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THE
MORALS OF MAY FAIR.

A NOVEL.

"Der Wahn ist kurz, die Reu' ist lang."
SCHILLER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE MORALS OF MAY FAIR.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a cold, gusty evening. Although the middle of May, the wind, as it swept up from the sea, howled round the Tête Noire rocks with more of the fierce melancholy of December, than of that ‘sweet sighing’ which should belong to the month of flowers; and the rain beat in torrents against the grey old walls and narrow casements of the Manoir de Kersaint, as it loomed grimly through the gathering mists and dying twilight.

The Manoir was situate in one of the wildest

parts of Western Brittany, and was a gloomy-looking building at all times—even with the summer sun shining on its many-paned windows, scutcheoned doorways, and high-pointed slate roofs; but doubly so, when, as was the case during six months of the year, the storms of the Breton coast beat around it, with groans, and shrieks, and tremulous wailings, which, to the superstitious peasantry of the district, might well seem like voices from the ghosts of shipwrecked mariners—many of whom every winter found a grave among the shoals and rocks of that cruel shore.

The Manoir stood about a league from the nearest town, and with no hamlet or cottage in its immediate neighbourhood. It was close to the sea—which, indeed, in stormy weather, often dashed its foam against the windows on that side which faced the bay—while between the house and the shore lay a garden, only exposed to the south, and sheltered even in winter from the rude north and north-western blasts. This garden was old-fashioned, stiff,

and quaint ; with a terrace overhanging the beach at the further end, flights of broken steps, an ancient sun dial, and the remains of a fountain—all records of the palmy days of the château, and the stiff taste of a by-gone age—but pleasant in summer, when bright flowers, tended by no unloving hands, decked its borders, and ripe peaches and grapes hung upon the warm southern wall.

On this evening, however, the garden looked desolate in the fast falling shadows, and the early flowers lay crushed and soiled under the heavy rain. The court gates communicating with the road on the other side of the house were firmly closed for the night; the watch dog lay silently sleeping in his kennel; and only through one of the lower windows, the uncertain flickering of a wood fire gave token of life, and the presence of human beings in this dreary habitation.

But, however cheerless the scene without, within that room was light and warmth, and a little group so happy in themselves, as

scarcely even to bestow a thought upon the drifting torrents of rain upon the windows, or the wind that screamed and eddied in the immense old chimney.

The room was itself a vast one, with a lofty painted ceiling, and floor of many-coloured woods, arranged in arabesque patterns. The faded furniture was of the style belonging to the reign of Louis Quinze, and conveyed an instant idea of former courtly days, and more ample means than were possessed by the present inhabitants of the Manoir. On the walls hung a goodly array of portraits—blooming, powdered, and wreathed with flowers; doubtless, some of them representing the fair châtelaines of Kersaint, who had once reclined on those very high-backed chairs of cramoisi damask, which now stood grimly ranged under their lifeless effigies. The enormous chimney-piece was of white marble, sculptured over with innumerable bands of roses, and figures of love and graces; whose projecting heads occasionally caught a rosy glow from the

capricious flickerings of the well-piled wood fire.

Before this fire were a little group of three persons ; and their appearance seemed to harmonize strangely with the old-world room they inhabited, although, at the same time, they gave it a warm and household aspect. It was indeed an ‘interior,’ upon which an artist’s eye might long have rested with delight ; half lit up as it was by the ever changing light from the hearth.

At intervals pale fitful gleams bathed the figures, and the whole room, then, quickly dying away into the red glow of the embers, left the large *salle* alternately black and sombre, or quivering for a few seconds in a soft half-shadow. Anon this wandering light would fall upon some projecting gilding of the picture frames, covered with medallions and crowns of carved wood, then on the massive furniture, plated in brass and ebony, or the delicately cut cornices of the wainscotting ; and then, as one brand fell extinguished and a new flame

broke from a different side of the fire, objects visible before returned again into obscurity, and other bright points stood out from the darkness. Thus the eye could gradually trace every detail of the picture. First the painted ceiling, bedecked with azure and stars, then the heavy console, supported upon four huge silver tritons, now darkened and tarnished with age ; lastly the fringed hangings of crimson damask, at the extreme end of the room, which, covered with wavy reflections, seemed to advance and recede mysteriously in the undulating rays of the fire.

In a large arm-chair, drawn towards the centre of the fire-place, sat an elderly man of grave and noble exterior. He might, perhaps, have been about fifty ; but study and an expression of habitual melancholy joined to delicate health, had made him look some years older than he really was. His high pale brow was perfectly bare at the temples, in which the blue veins were painfully visible, and around the eyes was that hollow rim which be-

speaks the slow, sure progress of life's decay. His tall figure was somewhat bent, and his white thin hands hung with an attitude of weakness upon the arm of the chair.

A rough deer-hound was at his feet, he was old and grey, but still bore traces of the strength and beauty of his youth. His wiry coat of a deep brindle hue, his black eyes, long, sharp muzzle and dark ears, still soft and silky, all bespoke his high race and pure blood. He had rested his head upon the invalid's knee, and now stood gazing up in his face with a tender melancholy expression, as though he could read, in his brute love, the signs of suffering so plainly written there; but when his master occasionally passed his hand over his shaggy neck, the creature's eyes softened and dilated with pleasure, and his long tail swept from side to side upon the hearth. At length he gave a little bark of impatience, as the object of so much love still kept his face averted, while he looked down at a young figure on his other side, and only extended an unthinking caress to the hound.

"Jealous, as usual, old Bell!" said a childish voice. "Father, if you even look at me too long, that creature barks." And the speaker, leaving a low stool by the hearth, came and seated herself by her father's feet and held up her little fist in the old hound's face.

She was a young girl of scarcely sixteen ; and a countenance of more perfect, and almost infantine sweetness, it would be difficult to conceive. It was just one of those faces so rarely met with, except in some picture by one of the old masters. Her hair—of a rich chestnut brown—hung in a flood of light upon her neck, and, forming a waving halo round her head, added to its pure Madonna-like character. She was very fair, with all the first blush of childhood upon her cheeks ; and her small white hand shone like a lily upon Bell's grizzly coat. Her eyes—of so deep a blue that in this light they seemed black—were fringed with the longest eyelashes ; and clearly-defined dark eyebrows gave a character to the otherwise soft countenance. In person

she was tall ; and, though so young, there was already promise of the richest lines of contour in the graceful shoulders, and full and exquisitely-proportioned bust. As it had never entered into her head, or that of her father, that she was approaching the age of womanhood, she was still dressed like a mere child, in a little muslin frock, without any ornament of lace or ruffle, and so short in the skirts as to allow a full view of her tiny feet in their well-worn house slippers.

She had no melancholy expression, like poor Bell, as she looked up into her father's face ; but continued laughing, and chattering, and playing with the dog, occasionally resting her head against her father's knee, or stroking the thin hand which hung listlessly at his side.

Another figure sat somewhat apart from the two principal ones ; but still near enough to enjoy the warmth from the fire, and mix with perfect freedom in the conversation. This was Manon, Marguerite's former nurse, and now their only attendant, who, with a re-

spectful familiarity still to be found amongst servants in the remote parts of France, always took her place near the evening hearth, gazing ever and anon at her master, then at his child ; but with the eternal stocking forming under her busy fingers, and which appeared to require neither light nor thought to aid its progress. Manon was a woman of about five and forty—perhaps older ; for hers was one of those faces which never look young, yet on which, after a certain time, years and years pass away and leave no further trace. She had the hard Celtic features peculiar to Brittany, and wore the usual costume of the peasants—the white linen head-dress, short dark petticoat, enormous apron, and bright handkerchief pinned across her bosom, over which hung a large silver crucifix.

The conversation was carried on in good French, which Manon understood well, although Breton was her native tongue. Marguerite spoke with the perfectly pure accent of a born French child ; but her father, al-

though possessing a thorough knowledge of the language, still bore traces, in the pronunciation, of being an Englishman.

“ How delightful to think that summer is come ! ” said the girl, pausing in her play with Bello. “ Do you know, father, the hawthorns are in full blossom on the warm side of the orchard, and the young linnets are hatched, and Bruno thinks I shall have some roses in a fortnight ? What a pleasant summer we shall have, darling old father ! —you will get so strong in the sunny, open air ; and, till you are well enough to walk, Manon and I will take you down in the garden chair to the shore, and you can sit quietly and enjoy the fresh sea breeze, while Bello and I run about on the sands, and keep watch over you.”

She looked so hopeful and happy that her father had no courage to tell her he saw small prospect of any summer weather making him strong again. His lips never could approach that cruel subject when talking to his

child ; although he had several times confided his forebodings about his state to the old servant.

“ Well, Marguerite, I hope this is not your idea of summer,” he answered, smiling; “listen to the wind and rain, as they drift against the windows. Where will your early flowers be to-morrow ?”

“ Only beaten down for a day, father ; by Sunday, they will be fresher than ever, and I shall make Manon the first bouquet she has had this spring, to take to mass with her.”

For Manon was, of course, a rigid Catholic, and, on fête days and Sundays, thought nothing of the long, rough miles she had to walk to the nearest town, to church. The rain or snow, indeed, nothing but the illness of her master, had ever kept her at home ; and, in fine weather, Marguerite frequently accompanied her. Mr. St. John had reared her in his own simple faith, but utterly apart from all sectarian prejudice ; and it gave the poor child such pleasure to go to the old cathedral

with Manon, and see the pictures, the rich vestments of the priests, the acolytes swinging the incense while the sun poured through the stained window over the altar; above all, to listen to the solemn peals of the organ, and the sonorous chanting of the priests, that her father was glad for her to have this one enjoyment; and, in time, the cathedral became to her childish fancy all imaginable beauty, grandeur, and sweet music, combined.

She had a passionate love for music herself, and Mr. St. John also thought it good for her to have this opportunity of gratifying it, and of hearing any other harmony than that of her own voice—although, to him, that was worth more than all the music upon earth.

“And if Sunday is fine,” Marguerite continued, “I may go with Manon, petit papa? —that is, if you are very well, and quite sure you will not want me——”

“And if we have no more rain between this and then,” chimed in Manon; “the roads are not in a state for your little feet, ma mie

Dame ! when I went to church, last Sunday, I had often to wade through the mire and bog well nigh up to my knees. Luckily, I had wrapped my white stockings round my Prayer-book, and put them in my pocket, before I set out."

"Oh ! Manon, how I wish I had seen you !" cried Marguerite. " You must have looked so droll, with your large ancles all covered in mud. Never mind, Bello, you shall come too, and carry me through these wonderful torrents on your back !" And she shook her long bright curls over the hound's eyes to wake him.

He made a start ; but on seeing how matters stood, only gave his usual impatient bark, and turning his head resolutely towards the fire went off again to sleep.

Mr. St. John closed his eyes, wearied, as he generally grew towards evening; and there was no sound for some minutes but the occasional click of Manon's knitting-needles, or the little hissing voices from the wood-fire,

and the eternal patterning of the rain. Marguerite was just meditating going in search of her kitten, to rouse up Bello, and make them all less silent, when the old clock in the hall struck nine.

“Supper time already!” she cried, jumping up. “How late we are to-night! Come, Manon, let us get lights at once, and make the omelette.”

Manon carefully folded her work, having first removed the disengaged pins from their place in her black hair, and struck them, with much precision, through the stocking; then she placed it all in the ample pocket of her apron, and followed Marguerite to the door. They felt their way through winding passages, and down many treacherous descents, until they reached the kitchen; where Manon, after considerable groping, struck a light, and they began their evening labours.

The kitchen was a low, dark, vaulted room, so large that it seemed to extend under the whole ground floor of the house; and the

one candle, and few expiring embers on the hearth, instead of lighting its obscurity, appeared only to render it more intense. There were strange old closets and projections, behind which a dozen men might lie concealed, in this kitchen ; and a ghostly owl took delight in flapping his wings against the casements of an evening : so, altogether, Manon was not fond of frequenting it alone after twilight, and generally persuaded made-moiselle to accompany her ; for Marguerite was not afraid of ghosts or owls, and she also liked to assist with her own hands in preparing her father's supper.

Manon on her knees, quickly succeeded in fanning the wood embers into a blaze ; the savoury omelette was soon upon the fire—the roasted potatoes among the ashes, declared to be done to perfection—and then Marguerite filled the kettle, and got ready the little tea service. Mr. St. John retained his old English liking for tea at night ; and it was his daughter's pleasure to arrange it for him,

herself, and to take care that it was strong and well made. Her father's cup of good tea was the one extravagance of their household. She looked like a little fairy, contrasted with Manon's solid form, while she flitted about, searching for the different objects she required, among the uncouth shadows of the place ; and her white, slender hands, and that nameless air of high birth, which was visible in each of her movements, seemed strangely at variance with the place and her occupation.

She went on chatting merrily to Manon in her sweet, full voice, while the old servant, although perfectly familiar, invariably answered in a tone of respect, which, even to strangers, would have expressed the difference of condition, and her own sense of it.

"This has been a long day, Manon," said Marguerite, suddenly.

"My days are never long, mademoiselle ; and to-day, I have been looking over the last year's preserves, to see what we must make this summer. Will you believe it, ma mie—

two jars of my best green-gage were empty, and I never knew the mice to touch them before."

"The mice—you silly old Manon; more likely Bruno!"

Manon almost dropped the pan containing her omelette, and her eyes flashed fire. "Bruno!" she exclaimed. "If I thought that lout—that idiot—that *cochon de paysan*—had touched one of my master's green-gages, I would—Bruno, indeed!"

"There!" cried Marguerite, "I have made you happy for the night, in giving you Bruno's sins to think over. Do you know, Manon, I wish sometimes that Bruno, or you, or some one, would do something really wrong. I am so tired of nothing happening."

"Nothing happening!" echoed Manon. "Why, Gilbert, the pedlar, was here yesterday, with all the news from Quimper; and Friday, eight days, M. le Curé met us in the road; and, in three weeks, we shall have the fair at N_____. Mon Dieu! it seems to me that a great deal happens!"

“ Does it ? ” answered Marguerite, dreamily ; “ well, I suppose so. But, sometimes, lately, I have wished for something more—I cannot exactly tell what. What *can* I want, Manon ? ”

If Manon knew, she did not choose to speak ; but, inspecting the omelette closely, she declared it to be done *à ravir* ; and then remarking that the carafe was empty, went off to fill it with fresh water, while Marguerite, who had to arrange the tray, forgot all about her own question.

And now the repast was ready, and carried in by Manon, Marguerite preceding her with a light. The snowy cloth was laid—the invalid’s chair wheeled round to the table—and Manon had taken her place behind her master, when an event suddenly occurred—for certainly the first time, at such an hour, within a dozen years—which made them all start with astonishment—the great bell of the court-yard rang.

Mr. St. John looked uneasy, as an invalid always does, at any unexpected interruption of

his usual existence. Manon exclaimed, “mon Dieu!” and crossed herself; Bello awakened this time in good earnest, gave a long, unearthly howl, which was echoed by the fierce barkings of the watch-dog without; while Marguerite clapped her hands, with delight, at ‘anything happening.’

Manon was the first to speak.

“Oh! master, they must be robbers—there can be no doubt of it; no visitor ever comes to Kersaint; and the country people know me better than to dare ring at the great bell at this hour—we shall all be murdered. Ah, bon Dieu! and all the saints, help us!”

Marguerite laughed aloud, and Mr. St. John answered—

“No, good Manon; if robbers were to attack a house like this, which is not likely, they would enter by the garden, and not warn us quite so loudly of their intentions. It is, more probably, some way-farer overtaken by the storm, and seeking a night’s shelter.”

“Then, come, Manon!” cried Marguerite

seizing a light with one hand, and the servant's sleeve with the other ; "let us open the door at once, and admit this poor traveller to our fire. Father, tell her to come with me." For Manon visibly hesitated, and drew back.

"Nay, Marguerite," he answered, "though I have small fear of robbers, yet, at this unusual hour, it would certainly be well to hold some parley through the little lattice, before opening the gates. I will go myself, and ascertain the character of our visitor's, and do you remain here until my return ;" and he rose feebly from his seat.

But to the last proposal his daughter and Manon made so instant and decided a resistance, that Mr. St. John was soon obliged to give them their own way. He must remain quietly by the fireside, while they proceeded to the lattice ; and if, after scrutinizing the strangers, they were not satisfied with their appearance, Marguerite would return and tell him the result ; and Bello, meanwhile, should

go as their protector. So they left the room; but Manon first placed the omelette and potatoes on a stand before the fire. No excitement made her forget her master's comfort; and, although she had just declared that they would all be robbed and murdered, she seemed to think it well to keep the supper hot until the completion of the tragedy.

The little window mentioned by Mr. St. John had formerly belonged to the concierge, or, in more ancient times still, to the manoir-warden, and was scarcely more than a loop-hole through the solid masonry on the outer side of the court facing the road; so that, in daylight, it commanded a good view of any person standing before the gates. Having lighted a lantern, Manon undid the manifold bolts of the house door, her healthy, red face being, by this time, several shades paler than usual, and, accompanied by Bello, they both ran through the rain, across the court yard, and gained the shelter of the great outer gates. There, a

winding stone stair-case led them up into the small chamber, or more properly speaking, look-out—for there was scarcely enough room in it for more than one person at a time—in which the loop-hole window was placed. After some difficulty, Manon undid the rusty fastenings of the casement, and, with considerable trepidation of manner, looked out first. But such a torrent of rain and sleet beat into her face as nearly blinded her, and she quickly drew back her head, exclaiming angrily—“*Milles tonnerres!*” which, under the circumstances, was not inappropriate. Marguerite with a stifled laugh next attempted, but with almost similar success. They had entirely forgotten that, while the light from their own lantern rendered their movements perfectly clear to any person without, they were themselves unable to see an inch into the profound darkness of the night.

“What shall we do?” whispered Marguerite, upon whose courage the gloom and uncertainty were beginning to tell a little; “had we better go down and speak through the door, or—”

“Return to the house at once, and not look at them at all,” added Manon quickly, as another vigorous peal at the bell close beside them, made them both start again.

“No, no, Manon, it may be some poor travellers seeking for shelter, as my father said. Let us first fasten up the chain so that they cannot enter, and then open the gate an inch or two, and speak to them.”

Manon unwillingly complied; and after much delay, caused by the trembling of her great strong hands, the gate was opened. She was, by this time, so gasping and frightened, that she could not get out a word; so Marguerite advanced her own face to the small space which was left open, to be speaker; while Manon held the light, exactly where it was of no service in seeing the strangers, but fell full upon the girl’s figure, and long streaming hair; and old Bello snarled and showed every tooth in his head, as he stood, waiting to seize upon anybody’s legs who might enter.

“Who are you?” said Marguerite, rather faintly, in French, of course, “and do you wish to come in?”

Whether it was this question, or the sight of the enraged old hound, and Manon’s terrified face, or all combined, which produced the effect is unknown; but a suppressed laugh was the first reply. Marguerite’s courage returned at the sound.

“Turn the lantern this way, so that we can see them,” she whispered, looking round.

Manon did so, and the light streamed—not upon a band of robbers—but upon the face of one young and handsome man, who, perfectly drenched with rain, stood outside in the road.

“Eh, mon Dieu!” exclaimed Marguerite, re-assured in a moment, “if I had only known it was you. Wait one moment, please,” and, aided by Manon, she hastily withdrew the chain, having first silenced Bello with an admonition to be friendly, which he appeared rather imperfectly to understand, as he still

continued showing his teeth, and uttering a low, dissatisfied growl.

The stranger entered, his cap in his hand, and the water literally streaming from his clothes and hair, and began an apology for disturbing them, in tolerable French, but which Marguerite knew in a moment to be that of a foreigner.

“I am so glad you have found our house,” she replied, in English; “my father will be delighted to see you, and he is an Englishman. You are very welcome to Ker-saint.”

The young stranger looked well pleased with his reception; and, when he had assisted in replacing the chain, they all crossed the court together. But, after entering the house, and just as Manon had re-fastened the bolts, while Marguerite was waiting impatiently to conduct the visitor to Mr. St. John, Bello overturned the lantern, which had been placed on the floor, and they were suddenly left in utter darkness.

“Never mind,” cried Marguerite, laughing, “I know the house quite as well at night as in the day. Give me your hand, please, and I will take you to my father.”

The stranger resigned his hand, nothing loath, to her little warm touch; and she led him on through endless windings and passages, occasionally saying, “Now down one step—now up two steps,” until he began to think he was in some enchanted house without an end. At length, they reached the door of the *salle*; there Marguerite whispered—“Just wait one moment here, while I go in; for my father is not strong, and I must prepare him to see you;” and, entering the room, she closed the door, with the simplicity of a child, exactly in his face; while Manon made many apologies, and vainly groped about for a light.

“It was a traveller, and I have let him in, father. He is quite young, very handsome, and an Englishman—and, oh, so wet!” cried Marguerite; while the stranger, just outside the door, naturally heard every word.

“An Englishman!” echoed her father, rising from his seat, and an expression of pleasure crossing his face. “An Englishman at Kersaint!—this is, indeed, strange—after more than fifteen years, to meet one of my own countrymen again! Well, he shall receive all the welcome we have to offer; but where have you left him, child?—not still shivering in the cold, I hope?”

“Oh, no, father!” returned Marguerite, triumphant at her own management. “He is quite close—only just outside the door;” and she returned to open it.

Mr. St. John advanced to meet the stranger, with the easy courtesy of a man who had been long used to good society. He shook his hand, and made many excuses for their suspicious mode of giving him welcome, adding—“But as I have lived in this lonely spot for sixteen years, and you are my first evening visitor, you will understand that we are somewhat cautious of opening our doors after nightfall.”

The Englishman said that he ought to apologize himself for disturbing the household at such an unseasonable hour. He was travelling through Brittany alone, and on foot, and, having lost his way, had been overtaken by the storm, and was almost blinded with the beating rain, when he suddenly found himself under the walls of the château, and rang the bell, in hopes of finding it inhabited. "Although," he added, "with little expectation of meeting so kindly a reception;" and he glanced at Marguerite.

"But now," returned Mr. St. John, "before you partake of refreshment, which you must so greatly need, or even approach the fire, you must at once change your dripping garments. Manon, take this gentleman to my room, and help him to find whatever he requires among my wardrobe."

The stranger, however, pointing to a small waterproof knapsack slung across his shoulders, said he was, fortunately, provided with a dry suit of clothes, and, in five minutes, would be

ready to join them at the supper-table ; and he then accompanied Manon up-stairs.

It was not long before he re-appeared. In the meantime, Manon had added some dainties from her store-room to their repast, and Marguerite prepared some fresh tea ; while her tongue ran on in a perfect maze of delighted bewilderment, at the adventure.

“ My own countryman—the first I ever saw but you, father—and so handsome, and such a soft voice ! I never saw anything like it all before. Oh ! we must ask him to stay a long time at Kersaint—it will be such a new life for us to have a visitor ; and—and—I shall have no time to go with you to church, on Sunday, Manon.”

CHAPTER II.

THE entrance of the stranger cut short Marguerite's words ; and the little party soon sat down to their evening meal. Bello, although partly re-assured, kept very close to his master, and occasionally eyed the new-comer from under his shaggy brows with no friendly expression, as though aggrieved at this interruption of their accustomed life ; but upon the human members of the lonely household, the guest quickly produced a most favourable impression. Mr. St. John's pale face, grew almost animated while listening to his lively account of his Breton adventures ; Marguerite's open delight expressed itself both in

looks and words ; and Manon, who could not understand the conversation, leisurely surveyed his handsome face and fine linen, and mentally decided that he was a worthy guest to sit at *their* table. It was certainly a face upon which nobility—if not of birth, that of soul—was legibly written.

The Englishman was pale, and, though young,—apparently about four or five-and-twenty—had already that careworn look which can arise only from some deep sorrow, or a too early knowledge of life and its passions. His forehead was high and fair; his features regular, and nobly cast; and his eyes, somewhat deeply set, had a mingled expression of grave intellect, and youthful softness, which gave a peculiar charm to his face. He was rather above the middle height, but slightly made; and Manon thought she had never seen such small, fair hands before.

Marguerite's gaze was quite as free as the old servant's; but what she noticed most was

the kindly expression of the stranger when he addressed herself, and the unusually musical tones of his voice. And, as Marguerite's world had hitherto been limited to her father, the curé, Manon, and the Breton peasants, it is not surprising that her admiration for their new guest bordered upon the enthusiastic.

"I hope you like our Bretagne," she said, when a pause emboldened her to speak.

"What I have seen of it and its people as yet," he answered, "has interested me greatly; especially in this wild, sea-side district, where I hope to linger away half the summer" (her face grew so bright). "But you say *our* Bretagne—have you then given up your claim to be Saxon, as the people here call us?"

"Ah!" answered her father, "poor little Marguerite forgets sometimes that she is English. She was born in this old house, where her whole childhood has since been passed; and has never known anything but

the rocks and forests of Brittany. You are the first Englishman, excepting myself, that she has ever seen ; and, but that I make it a point for her to read with me in her own language every day, she would long ago have been French, in that, as in everything else. Even as it is, I suppose, she speaks like a foreigner ; for Manon is much with us in our primitive life, and we never converse before her in a language she cannot understand ; and our good friend the curé, who occasionally spends the winter evenings with us, has been Marguerite's French teacher from her infancy.

"I certainly thought your daughter was French," replied the stranger ; "though speaking English unusually well."

"Ah ! I want practice," replied Marguerite rather indignantly ; "for father, you know you read all day, except when you are teaching me, and then in the evening we must talk French for Manon. Now that monsieur is come, however," she added, "I shall have some one to talk to ;" and she glanced at the young

Englishman, who could not forbear smiling at her childish expressions, and utter absence of what is usually called manner.

He resumed his conversation with Mr. St. John, but in a few minutes Marguerite rose, and going to her father's side put her arm round his neck, and whispered something. He smiled and shook his head ; but she insisted, and then looking towards his guest, Mr. St. John said—

“ Although my little daughter has been brought up among wilds and deserts all her life, she has still the natural curiosity of her sex at heart ; and cannot rest until she has heard the name of our visitor.”

“ Oh ! petit papa,” interrupted Marguerite ; “ when you know I wished you to ask for yourself, and not for me ! ” and she blushed crimson ; but still fixed her eyes intently upon the young Englishman, as though the subject were one of all-engrossing interest.

For a moment the young man looked somewhat confused, and the slightest shade of

colour rose in his own face, at the question ; but quickly recovering his composure he replied, “ I am only too happy to satisfy mademoiselle’s wish. My name is Philip Earnscliffe.” And his tone seemed to imply that in hearing that answer, his new friend would at once be acquainted with his history.

But Mr. St. John simply bowed with the air of one who hears a perfectly unknown name, and Marguerite communicated the discovery to Manon in French, adding in a whisper, ‘ that she thought Philip Earnscliffe the most beautiful name in the whole world ;’ while the stranger himself, was evidently relieved at the unconscious manner of his host on hearing his name.

“ And now, Marguerite, as your own curiosity is satisfied, perhaps, you will tell Mr. Earnscliffe how we—out-of-the-world people—call ourselves,” said her father.

“ Pray do so,” added the stranger. “ I may now confess that, for the last hour, I also have wished to ask that question.”

They had left the supper-table, and were all seated round the fire, Marguerite in her old place at her father's feet, with her arm over Bello—who was gladly forgetting his injuries under the influence of warmth and sleep—and Mr. Earnscliffe placed where his eyes could rest fully upon the little group. Marguerite looked up at him, when her father spoke, with that full, confiding gaze, never seen, save on the face of a child, and replied, gravely—

“ My father's name is Percy, and mine is Marguerite Lilla St. John. Marguerite, after my little sister, who died before I was born, and Lilla,” she added, very softly, “ after my own dear mother. I never saw her, monsieur ; she left *us* alone,” touching her father's hand, “ when I was born.”

Her father's face clouded at these recollections ; and he soon grew so pale and silent, that Manon, who was hovering about the background, came forward, and reminded him that it was long past his usual hour for rest ;

then, turning respectfully to Earnscliffe, she said—

“ My master is not very strong at present, sir ; and mademoiselle and I are obliged to keep watch over his health.”

The guest having entreated that Mr. St. John would not remain longer, out of ceremony towards him, he rose ; and then the Englishman first fully saw how thin and weak he was. He extended his hand to Earnscliffe, and said, kindly, he should hope on the morrow to rise stronger, and be better able to entertain him, adding—

“ At all events, my little one will be only too delighted to show you all the walks and wonders of the neighbourhood ; and I hope you will spend as long a time at Kersaint as you can find anything to interest you.”

Earnscliffe heartily accepted this invitation, and, after bidding him ‘ good night,’ his host withdrew—first kissing his daughter, and saying, in a low voice—

“ But you, my child, can stay up longer, and entertain our guest.’

“ And not help you, father ?”

“ No, not to-night, darling.” And he took Manon’s arm, and walked to the door.

Marguerite had a confused idea, that politeness required her to remain by the visitor’s side ; but when she saw her father, for the first time since his last serious illness, going up to his room without her attendance, the tears rushed into her eyes, and she turned round to Earnscliffe—

“ Oh ! I must go with him, sir, if you please. I will not be long—but, indeed, I cannot see him walking so feebly, and not help as well as Manon !”

Earnscliffe begged her to do so ; and, running lightly to her father’s side, she supported him with her own firm young arm ; while the poor invalid smiled gratefully at his child’s warm love, which nothing could for a moment turn aside.

The stranger was left alone, and stood gazing at the door through which Mr. St. John and his daughter had disappeared ; and

a gloomy expression crossed his face, as he recalled the scene he had just witnessed. "This dying man," he thought, "living in the midst of a dreary solitude, and with pain and suffering written upon his features, possesses the priceless treasure of human love, which I, with youth and health, have never found in the world. He is happy in all the first affection of that girl's young heart. And what a lovely being she is!" he continued, to himself. "With the unconscious grace of a perfect woman, and the artlessness of a child. How she looked at me, and smiled, and then turned away her little head, blushing, only to look again a moment afterwards!" He thought for some minutes, then said, half aloud—"It will be better for her, and for me, too, perhaps, that I should leave them to-morrow morning;" and he turned round, and walked up and down before the fire.

But, as still he continued alone, his late companions seemed gradually to lose their recent tangible forms, and to fade into a mere,

creation of his own brain. The lonely spot in which he had suddenly met two such beings as Mr. St. John and his daughter—the manner of their introduction—the château, with its old world furniture—the dim outline of the gigantic hound who lay outstretched upon the hearth, and the weird voices of the storm, which still beat against the windows—all combined to give to the evening's adventure something dreamy and unlife-like; and Marguerite seemed, to him, more like some Breton fairy, than a real blooming inhabitant of that gloomy house. “She is a mere child, too,” he went on, at length—“a lovely little meadow-daisy—but no more! What can she be to me, but a pretty, wild idea for the heroine of my next book? Why, her whole innocent life precludes any other thoughts, even if my own position did not. I will stay and make this fresh nature my study, and leave them in a few days. I have had enough of love”—he smiled bitterly—“without adding another failure to my experience; and if I do create

any feeling in this girl's heart, it will be only the awakening of a first fancy, no deeper than that of a child for a new toy. All her love is given to her father; and if it were not so, she would run small danger from me."

The door opened, and the little meadow-daisy, entering herself, interrupted his meditations upon her. She approached him, her face radiant with a grave happiness.

" You have done my father good already!" she cried. " Although he is tired, he is so cheerful, and glad to have heard an English voice. Manon says—and she understands well about his health—that it will do him more good than taking all the medicines in the world, to have a new companion. I know so little, you see," she added, humbly, " that I am not enough for him."

Earnscliffe thought how charming it was when a woman knew so little; but he checked a rising compliment, and only enquired if her father had been long ill.

" Oh! do not call him ill," she answered,

with a look of sudden terror. “Surely you do not think that my father is ill.”

Her voice faltered ; and, to the beseeching expression of her eyes, Earnscliffe could only answer gently ‘that he meant Mr. St. John appeared delicate and to require care.’

“Yes ! he is not very strong at present ; but then, you know, we have had a long, cold winter, and he has not had much opportunity yet of recovering from his illness in the autumn, when he had a lingering, low fever. Now that the summer has come, he can be out all day in the garden, and gain his strength. Should you not think he will be quite well in two or three months ?”

Earnscliffe tried to join in her hopes, although his own conviction was that Mr. St. John had not long to live ; but her terrified look at the mere idea of her father being seriously ill, made him turn from the subject, and he began inquiring how she spent her own time in summer.

This was a theme on which Marguerite

could be eloquent. She told him of all the wild haunts on the sea-shore—of the distant caves among the St. Hernot rocks—of the one small sunny bay so hard to reach, even at low water, but where you were sure to find the most beautiful shells and sea-weed—of the high cliff, from whence there was the widest view—of the ruined chapel—the heath—the fir-forests—the meadows, now full of primrose and hepatica—the hawthorn lane, with the linnet's nest—and, lastly, of their own orchard and garden ; ending it all with—

“ But, if to-morrow is only fine, I will take you to see our walks, and then you will believe what a happy place this is in summer.”

He listened with evident interest ; and encouraged her to proceed with her descriptions. It was something strangely new to him to listen to such conversation as hers ; and he found a singular pleasure in gazing down upon her animated features, and hearing all her childish

accounts of her life. Marguerite soon forgot that she had only known him two hours ; and, when Manon at length entered, she found the guest still standing by the fire, with Marguerite close to his side, speaking very earnestly, and looking up in his face.

“ Monsieur’s room is ready,” said Manon ; “ and, after his cold drenching, he should endeavour to get a good night’s rest—it is past eleven o’clock.”

“ Past eleven !” echoed Marguerite, who had never been up so late before. “ Why, how quickly the time has gone ! I thought it was only ten minutes since my father left us.”

“ It was impossible for the stranger not to feel somewhat pleased at this *naïf* acknowledgment, from such a mouth ; and as he looked in her glowing face, he thought he had never, among all the beauties of London, seen any one to compare with the little meadow-daisy, Marguerite.

She held out her hand with the most per-

fect frankness, wishing him “Good night;” and Earnscliffe followed Manon up the oak staircase, and along the winding passages of the first floor, to the room prepared for him—a quaint, old chamber, all hung with faded blue arras, and where he could hear the loud beating of the waves close under the windows; but a cheerful wood-fire blazed on the hearth, and made him seem welcome.

“Good night, and sound sleep to monsieur,” said Manon, as she handed him the light, and took a last look round the room, to see that all was in comfortable order for the stranger. Then she closed the door, and descended to her young mistress. Marguerite was still standing in the same place, with Bello sound asleep at her feet, wishing the morrow were come, and wondering why the whole world had suddenly grown so bright.

“Is it not delightful, Manon?” she exclaimed, as her nurse re-entered,

“What, ma mie?”

“Why, having a visitor, of course—and

such a visitor ! Oh ! Manon, how unlike any-one here, with his gentle manner and low voice ! And he spoke so beautifully to my father—and yet did not mind listening to my childish talk ! Did you ever see anyone so handsome ?

“ This young man is good looking,” replied the other in a tone which sounded very cold to Marguerite, “ and his shirt front is of the finest batiste I ever saw ; but he has a look at times, which is much too grave for such a young face. I don’t believe his life has been as happy as ours, ma mie !”

And Manon was right.

CHAPTER III.

PHILIP EARNSCLIFFE had lived and suffered more than the generality of men at six-and-twenty. His parents both died during his early childhood, and circumstances had thrown him, when a mere boy, upon the treacherous sea of London society. Gifted to no common extent—handsome, warm-hearted, generous, and, above all, the heir to an immense fortune, Earnscliffe had not wanted friends. Few indeed could look on his fair, noble face, or hear the tones of his singularly sweet voice, without becoming interested in him ; but, unfortunately his lot lay among a class of

persons, of all, the least likely to conceive really disinterested attachments, or to assist in the formation of a character, which natural softness and absence of all self-reliance made only too ductile.

Philip's mother was a woman of high family—which family she was considered to have irrevocably disgraced, by eloping with her brother's tutor at the very time her mother was planning her marriage with a hoary-headed foreign prince. Mr. Earnscliffe was a gentleman by birth as in feeling, and was also a scholar of no mean attainments; but he was poor, and without connection or influence in the church; and all the happy married life of Philip's parents was spent in an obscure and very small living in the north of England. For the outraged family of Earnscliffe's wife would not bestow any of their church patronage upon the man who had disgraced them; and, indeed, held no communication whatever with their daughter, from the hour of her marriage. Philip was the only offspring of the union,

and all the fond love of these two gentle hearts was centered in their lovely, promising child.

But when the boy was about four years old, Mr. Earnscliffe's health, at no time robust, began visibly to decline. The strong, vigorous air of the north had never suited him, although he had not felt himself justified in giving up his small living for this cause ; and not until it was too late, did his agonized wife read in his face, and in the evasive answers of the country physician, that the fiat had gone forth—and they were to part. But, from the first, something told her she would not long survive her husband. She had been his so exclusively, from the moment her own family cast her off, and in their lonely life they had seen so little of any but each other, that her very existence seemed bound up in that of Earnscliffe, as every will and thought of her heart were dependent upon his.

Had it not been for the child, perhaps neither of them would have greatly grieved to

leave the world, where they had met with so much neglect. But their child—their unprotected, unprovided-for child—to leave him, was indeed the bitterness of death ; and all the thoughts of both turned unceasingly upon him, and the stranger hands into which their unstained jewel was to be committed.

Mr. Earnscliffe had one brother, many years older than himself, and a man of enormous property, amassed solely by his own endeavours, in India. Their father was a man of small fortune, and not able to give both his sons a college education ; so the elder, and stronger one, had to make his way for himself ; while the delicate, gentle Herbert was destined for the church from his infancy. A mere lad, with a few pounds in his pocket, Miles Earnscliffe started, and worked his way out in a merchant vessel. On his arrival in India, he got one of the most menial offices in a large mercantile firm ; one of the partners having picked the boy up for his shrewd face, but without recommendation. A dogged un-

tiring perseverance and thorough integrity, united, certainly, to some degree of good fortune, raised him step by step, from errand boy to clerk—clerk to manager—manager to partner—until, at length, Miles Earnscliffe was one of the wealthiest merchants in Calcutta ; and thirty years after he had left his country a friendless, penniless youth, he returned to it with boundless wealth, and as many friends as he had rupees.

He had never held much communication with his brother, and was ignorant of his marriage or its results. Shortly after his return, however, he received a letter, in which Herbert, after warmly congratulating him on his brilliant fortunes, gave him a sketch of his own life—of his marriage, and present condition—concluding with a hope that, for the future, the brothers would see more of each other than their divided state had hitherto permitted.

But with the suspicion which long years of lonely labour, and distrust of every one but

himself, had engendered, Miles Earnscliffe thought that the gentle, affectionate letter contained some covert request for money ; and as he read, every feature in his face worked with rage. Of poverty—as poverty—he had, like all self-made men, the most utter contempt ; but when to this was added education, refinement, and the profession of a gentleman, he could scarcely keep his hatred within bounds. He crunched the letter up, flung it into the fire, and paced up and down his lordly room, muttering aloud—

“ So, my fine gentleman brother, whose white hands were not made for work—with your college education, and brainful of Greek and Hebrew—you have married a noble, titled beggar, whose family despise and scorn you ; and I—the low, vulgar, hard-working tradesman-brother, am to help you and your grand lady-wife to live ! Never, by — ! ”

And, leaving his untasted breakfast, he sat down, and wrote Herbert a coarse, unfeeling letter ; which the latter read once, destroyed, and never even mentioned to his wife.

And thus ended the brothers' intercourse. But, when death was upon him, and Earnscliffe looked in his little Philip's face, pride died in his heart. He forgot the past insult, and only remembered his isolated position, and that his brother might be the child's powerful friend and protector for life. Accordingly, after deep deliberation, he made a new will ; appointing Miles sole guardian of his son, and leaving the small property he had to bequeath to his care. This done, he consigned the future to the hands of Providence ; rightly judging that his brother's iron heart might more readily soften to the child as an orphan, than during his parents life-time. In three months from this time, Philip's father and mother were dead.

Miles read the announcement of his brother's death in the paper ; and, a few weeks afterwards, that of his wife, and something human smote at his heart as he thought of the child ; but pride forbade him making any enquiries about his 'pauper relations.'

It was now late in the autumn ; and, one cold, stormy night, Miles sat alone in his splendid dining-room, over his wine. He was abstemious from long habit, and never took more than two or three glasses ; so now he sat, with his empty glass at his side, watching the bright logs crackle and blaze upon the hearth, and listening to the mournful soughing of the wind, as it beat fitfully upon the windows. It sounded to him like the voices of the poor trying in vain to enter the rich man's dwelling, and the unusual thought made him turn restlessly in his easy chair.

" Will the evening papers never come ? " he exclaimed, after again waiting long and silently. " It is cursed lonely to-night."

And the weary Crœsus rang the bell impatiently.

At that moment, a knock—a little, fluttering knock—came at the dining-room door.

" Come in ! " thundered Miles. " What the

devil are the idiots at now?—scratching like rats, instead of bringing me my paper."

The door opened slowly, and only after repeated turnings of the handle, and in came—to old Miles's amazement, and almost horror—a child—a very small, young child, dressed in the deepest black, and with long fair hair falling all round its face and neck.

"What the —!" he began, hastily, starting to his feet; but the words died unfinished on his lips—as still, slowly, but without the slightest trace of fear or shyness, the child continued to approach him. When he was quite near, he looked up in Miles's face, and, touching his hand with his own little cold finger, said—

"Are you my uncle? If you are, I have brought you a letter from my papa," and he pulled a sealed envelope from under his dress, and held it up to him.

Earnscliffe was a cold, hard, suspicious, worldly man; but he was human—and in every human breast lurks the tie of blood,

and pity for a fatherless child. And as Philip, in all the confidence of childhood, stood looking up in his uncle's face, his lips parted, and the golden curls falling back from his open brow, he recalled so strongly, in his infantine beauty, the image of his own father,—whom Miles had last seen, long years before, a bright-eyed boy, hanging round his neck, and weeping before he went to India—that his usually hard feelings were softened in the sudden remembrance of his youth; and, seizing his nephew in his arms, he kissed him with tenderness than he had shown to anything more for years. Philip wound his little arms round his neck, and stroked his cheek. His parents had prepared him to love him, and, with the ready warmth of his nature, he already clung to the uncle, who was to supply their place to him. Supply their place—poor child !

On his mother's death, their nearest neighbours, a farmer and his wife, had taken Philip to their house, as they had already promised Earnscliffe, and comforted him, in their homely

fashion, during his first passionate sorrow; but three weeks had now elapsed, and already his pale cheeks were more blooming, and he began again to laugh merrily over his play. In childhood, three weeks is an eternity of grief. The good farmer had himself journied with Philip to Miles Earnscliffe's door, and there left him as his father had requested, merely asking the servants to allow the boy, unannounced, to enter his uncle's presence. At first there was considerable demur among these grand gentlemen, as to the propriety of this proceeding; but Philip settled the matter for himself, by walking through them all with the air of a young prince, and knocking at the first door that took his fancy, which chanced to be that of the dining-room—and thus, as we have seen, introduced himself to his uncle's notice.

Philip still nestled in his new protector's arms, when the door noiselessly opened, and the stately butler entered—contrition and apology duly impressed upon his fat features.

“Indeed, sir, it was quite against my knowledge, sir——” he was beginning, when he suddenly stopped. The sight of Miles Earnscliffe—of *his* master—with a child in his arms, so astonished the worthy man, that he was, to use his own words, when describing the scene afterwards, “took all of a heap,” and the unfinished sentence gurgled and choked in his throat.

Miles set the boy hastily on the ground, enraged that one of his own servants should have witnessed his emotion, and, red with passion, demanded what he meant.

“I did not know, sir,” replied the gasping butler, “that you might like to be interrupted, sir—I thought ——”

“And who requires you to think, sir?” was the reply. “My nephew can go where he pleases in my house, and enter my dining-room when and as often as he likes, without the interference of my servants. Send Mrs. Scott at once,” he added, as the butler, very crest-fallen, left the room; and he was again

alone with the new-comer, who hoped his uncle would never look so angry at him, as he did at the big man with the white head and black breeches.

Mrs. Scott, a thin, starched, unpleasant looking middle-aged female, was much aggrieved at hearing of the unexpected addition to the household. On the strength of many traditionary accounts of wealthy nabobs espousing their own housekeepers, she had been always pleased at the isolation in which her master lived, and was disposed to look with no favourable eye upon any new claimant of his attentions. However, she put on her sweetest smiles as she proceeded to the dining-room, and entered, with the blandest of curtsies to Miles, and what she meant for an encouraging motherly look at Philip, who immediately grasped his uncle's hand the tighter.

"Mrs. Scott, my nephew having arrived some days earlier than I expected, you have as yet received no orders for his reception. You will now see a room prepared for him for

to-night, and to-morrow—have nurseries and attendants got ready for him at once.”

The housekeeper, with venom at her heart, smiled most sweetly at this announcement; and when Earnscliffe added—“And now take him with you for whatever refreshments he requires,” held out her hand with great kindness to Philip—but the child turned away from her, and looked imploringly at Miles.

“Oh! let me stay with you this once, uncle; I like to stay with you, and I don’t love her,” pointing to Mrs. Scott. “I will be so quiet here.” Miles chuckled at this speech, and at the housekeeper’s visible discomfiture, and dismissing her, now fairly boiling over with indignation, prepared himself to spend the evening alone, in company with his brother’s child. He sat down in his arm-chair, and Philip drawing a little stool to his feet, seated himself also.

“This is how I used to do at home with my papa,” said the boy, “and he gave me my dessert on a plate.”

"Oh, oh!" said Miles, "I see through it all now;" and he filled a plate with peaches and grapes, and handed it to him. "It was for the sake of the dessert you wished to stay with me." Philip jumped up, his face all in a glow of indignation. He had never even been accused of untruth before.

"You may keep your fruit," he said, pushing the plate as far as he could upon the table, "I won't eat it. I wanted to stop with *you*, and never thought of your dessert till you gave it me." And his eyes flashed again.

Miles was more pleased at this display of spirit than even with his former caresses; and, drawing him to his knee, said he did not doubt his truth, and only meant to joke him.

"Oh!" returned Philip, brightening up, "if you were only in joke, of course, that is different, and I don't care a bit; but you said it so like earnest." And all his anger vanished.

So again he sat down, the plate in his lap,

and began his fruit. How fair he looked, with the red firelight dancing on his long, waving hair, and white neck and arms, which shone like marble upon his sable dress, dividing the fruit with his rosy fingers, and, every minute, looking up and smiling archly at Miles.

“ You have very good fruit, I think, here ; we had only apples and plums at home, though they were very sweet, too, I never saw fruit like this before.”

“ I should think not,” said his uncle, complacently. “ You will see a great deal in my house that you never saw before.”

“ Shall I ?” returned Philip, with much animation, “ Oh ! tell me what !” and, having finished his dainties, he came and stood close to his uncle’s side. “ Can you tell stories ?” he whispered,—as Miles remained silent—looking enquiringly up into his face.

“ Well,” he replied, “ I suppose I could if I tried.”

“ Then please let me sit on your lap, and

tell them to me till my bed-time ;” and, without further invitation, he seated himself on his uncle’s knee, folded his hands, composed himself comfortably to listen, and then said—“ Begin.”

And old Miles began, awkwardly enough—as might be expected of a man who had never talked to children in his life—and in a very low voice, as though he were half ashamed of himself. But Philip saw no defects or hesitation; and, when he came to stories of parrots and monkeys, clapped his little hands with delight, and cried out—

“ Tell it again, tell it again !”

So Miles told it again; and went on improving until Philip was fairly in ecstacies, and thought he had never seen such a funny man as his uncle. Miles Earnscliffe a funny man !

And thus passed the evening. At length the child’s head drooped, and his eyes grew heavy with fatigue, and his uncle said he must go off to bed.

"Yes, directly," said Philip. Then he lingered and looked rather shy—"but I want to say something first. When my mamma was alive, I used to say my prayers to her. Oh, uncle! let me say them to you, this one night—because I am all alone here, and I don't like to say them to Mrs. Scott."

Miles assented with a husky voice; and the child knelt down, and folding his dimpled hands on his uncle's knees, said his evening prayers; concluding with "God bless papa and mamma;"—poor little fellow!—as though they still needed the weak, imperfect prayer of their child.

And now he is gone; and Miles sits long by the red fire-light, with new thoughts in his heart, and a softer expression on his hard face, and his dead brother's open letter in his hand.

CHAPTER IV.

PHILIP was thus installed in his uncle's house ; and, in one of those sudden revulsions of the heart, to which the hardest of human beings are subject, Miles Earnscliffe had soon conceived an almost passionate love for the child. After living all his life mistrustful, and alone, a natural source of affection was at length opened for his hitherto barren feelings, and they seemed more intense, from the very fact of having been so long pent up in his own bosom. Philip was soon paramount in the house. Mrs. Scott, the boy seemed to look upon as a natural enemy, and after a six

weeks' war, Mrs. Scott was dismissed. He had a cheerful young relation of his old friend the farmer, for his own attendant, birds and pets for his amusements, a Shetland pony to ride; in short, a flood of sunshine seemed to have broken upon the house, which used to be so 'dull and dignified.'

Miles was more happy in the change than he would acknowledge to himself. To hear Philip's little voice, as he played about the room during breakfast—to have him prattling at his knees, in the long winter evenings—to look in his fair face, and feel, 'he, of my own blood, and not a stranger, shall inherit my wealth'—all this gave him a living interest in his life, and in his riches, which he had never felt before. As the boy grew older, he was formally announced by Miles to be his heir; and it is needless to say what numbers of friends awaited young Philip in the world. Although his uncle himself hated society, his pride was gratified by all the attentions showered upon his heir; and he would chuckle

to himself as he thought ‘how much love would Phil’s grand relations have shown him, if he had not been adopted by his vulgar old uncle?’

For, gentle reader, the family of Philip’s mother—with that beautiful constancy to a rich relation, so frequently to be observed in the world—although they had cast off a daughter of their house for marrying a poor man, were exceedingly anxious to court the poor man’s rich brother. Miles had, himself, abandoned Herbert in his poverty; but he felt the greatest disgust at their meanness; and insulted his lordly relations on more than one occasion when he chanced to meet them in the world. After his adoption of Philip, however, and, as the latter grew up, he began to relent towards them, for the child’s sake; for he wished his nephew to have an introduction to the very society he had himself always affected to despise. The first amiable advances on the part of the eccentric Mr. Earncliffe—very rich men are only eccentric, never

rude--were met cordially ; his former rebuffs were forgotten with true Christian charity ; and Philip found a score of affectionate grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, all ready to love him. As Herbert Earnscliffe's son, they would, probably, have considered him a common-place, uninteresting boy ; but, as Miles Earnscliffe's nephew, every one discovered that he had inherited his father's wit, and his mother's beauty.

It happened that all these praises were, as regarded Philip, true. He grew up exceedingly handsome ; with more, perhaps, of that beauty which awakens interest from the intellect shining through the outward form—than of the mere physical perfection which attracts the common mass of people. And yet Philip's features, of themselves, were all good and finely chiselled. The Grecian nose, and full, poet mouth, might have borne the most critical scrutiny ; although it was in his brow, and deep, spiritual eyes, that lay the rare charm of his face.

He went to Harrow, and did not shine there; some of his masters pronouncing him merely idle, others a dunce. But when Miles, in stern displeasure, questioned the boy upon these evil reports, Philip's only reply was—“Uncle, I have as much ability as any of my masters, though I cannot learn as they teach. Take me from school, and let me study at home, and I will be a greater man than any of them.” Miles would do nothing of the kind, so Philip remained at Harrow the usual number of years, and left it with the proportionate amount of ignorance and Greek, which can be acquired at an English public school. But his mind had not lain idle all this time. His education had been—not in the wretched daily routine of immoral classics—but in his life. In his school friendships, and dislikes; in all the varieties of human life—although only that of boys—which he had learnt to analyze; in his own transition from childhood into youth; in the long summer walks among the Harrow hills; in his solitary

evening dreams under the starlight, his poet's mind had gradually dawned. And at the end of five years he left school, no scholar, but a genius.

"What are you at, Phil?" his uncle would exclaim testily, when he was continually filling endless sheets of writing-paper, and absenting himself from all his old amusements; and Phil had not the moral courage to say 'he was writing a book;' knowing well that Miles was no lover of authors, and would, probably, not be pleased at the prospect of having one in his own nephew; so he evaded the question and kept his papers out of sight, but, in his own study, returned with redoubled ardour to his occupation, made all the sweeter from having to be pursued by stealth. As his work grew, and he felt within him the wonderful power of creative genius strengthening, day by day, his love for his art increased tenfold. It was with Philip no wish for fame, no feverish desire to be heard of, but the mere

delight of creating, which impelled him to write; and with extraordinary rapidity the book proceeded. Full of faults it was, both of diction and composition ; but with frequent touches of true pathos, vigorous conception, and a shrewd and caustic wit, which bespoke the early dawnings of no common mind. At length, he finished it. One summer midnight, he wrote the last line ; and then, for the first time, he felt that he had succeeded. Although no eye but his own had ever read a word of his writings, something within him said that his was not like the generality of books, and that he was to be one of the few who rise apart from the common leaven of humanity. He extinguished his little lamp, and, throwing open his window, walked out upon the balcony.

The summer night, with its thousand voluptuous odours—the soft, warm air—the deep sky above—and the stars, those mysterious types of immortality, which seem, in every deep emotion, to have kindly sym-

pathy with the heart of man—all harmonized with his own happy feelings. Nature seemed bidding him welcome among the poet band, who alone interpret her rightly, and are her apostles to the weary children of the world. He remained long, building a hundred bright dreams for the future—those first visions of fame than which the hopes of love are not sweeter—and when he at length retired to rest, he slept not; for now other and more practical thoughts arose upon his mind.

How should his first work appear before the world?—should he publish anonymously, and unknown to his uncle, trusting merely to his own merit for success? At first, he liked the idea, but then his heart revolted against even a temporary concealment from Miles; he thought of the old man's disappointment at his Harrow failures, and felt he should confide his secret to him, and let him participate with him in his hopes and triumph. Then, again, he thought of his uncle's sarcastic remarks about authors of fiction—‘trashy rubbish,’ as

he called novels ; and so the hours passed, in a conflict of opposing plans, until daybreak, when he rose to read and re-touch portions of his work.

When he came down to breakfast, next morning, his heavy eyes bore ample testimony to the way in which he had passed the night. He had decided to broach the subject at once ; and his manner was constrained, as he seated himself and began his breakfast, without knowing what he was about.

Miles eyed him sharply ; he had watched Philip much of late. His abstraction, his late hours, his paled cheek, had not escaped his notice ; and a suspicion had arisen, the bare thought of which filled him with horror—the boy must have fallen in love. Of course, he looked forward, some day, to his marrying a woman with rank or money ; but of love, or youthful romance, he had almost a greater horror than of poverty, and he was resolved to cure all such nonsense in its beginning. He had never known a similar weakness him-

self, and classed it with measles, and other childish disorders, that must be gone through. He only wished his nephew had had the good grace to keep clear of the contagion.

“What ails you, Phil?—with your ghostly white face—helping yourself three times to sugar, and crumbling your bread all over the table-cloth—do you hear me, sir?”

“Yes, sir,” said Philip, looking very guilty; “I—the fact is—I——”

“Oh, yes, it is all coming!” groaned Miles, internally; then he added aloud, with sarcastic politeness—

“Pray take your time, nephew; I am in no hurry.”

“I fear you will not be pleased, uncle. I should have told you sooner, but——”

“But what, sir?” interrupted Mr. Earnscliffe, angrily. “I know the meaning of your hesitation, and your blushes, and your modesty. Tell me the woman’s name, you love-sick young idiot, at once, and have done with it.”

“The woman’s name!” said Philip, looking

up in amazement, and with his face exceedingly red. “It has nothing to do with any woman in the world. I have written a book, sir,” bringing out the last words with an effort.

Miles heaved a colossal sigh of relief; he drank an entire cup of tea—buttered some toast—looked Philip full in the face—and then went into a hearty fit of laughter.

“So you have written a book?—oh!”

“Yes, sir. I am glad to see you so amused.” Philip had already too much of the author in him, not to feel offended at the way his important announcement was received.

“A book—ho! ho!—don’t be angry; and what are you going to do with it?”

“Publish it,” he returned, shortly.

“Well, I suppose, at your age, you must do something ridiculous; and it is so infinitely better than the other thing, that I feel actually relieved. But a book—well—what is it all about?”

“Perhaps, you would like to hear some of

it?" replied Philip—he could not long be angry with his uncle—"I should be glad to read you some of my scenes."

"Is it in verse? No. Well, that is a comfort. A novel, I suppose? I thought so. I am an excellent judge of that valuable class of works, and shall be happy to give you my criticism. We will publish it, by all means (without our name, if you please); and I daresay our first success will be such, as to make us leave book-writing alone for the future."

And in this cheerful strain Miles finished his breakfast. He loved Philip deeply, but it was not in his power to refrain from saying spiteful things, even to him; and looking upon him, with all his good looks and noble qualities, as no genius—there was really, to him, something quite ludicrous in this new idea of authorship.

"I shall be in the library at eleven, punctually, for the reading, Phil," he said, as they parted. "Bring the shortest chapters."

Philip went sadly to his own room. He was very young ; and his uncle's sarcastic manner had fallen like a pall upon all his bright hopes.

“ Yes,” he thought, “ I daresay he is right. I have no real genius ; and the world will think so, too.”

He took his manuscript in his hand, and turned the leaves over almost with a feeling of disgust.

“ And all this, that only last night I thought was to live for ever, is, perhaps, worthless nonsense.”

And he began, bitterly, to read a passage aloud. But, even as he did so, the feeling under which that very passage was written—a description of genius slowly conquering difficulties, and rising above this world to another—returned to him, and his own words became his comforters.

“ I *have* genius !” he exclaimed, aloud, “ I know—I feel it. My uncle has not heard any of my writings yet ; and, even when he has,

and if he judges ill of it, it shall not alter me. I must succeed."

He laid down the manuscript ; and walking up and down the room, waited impatiently for the appointed hour, when he descended—his work under his arm—to the library. His uncle was already there.

"Heaven help me!" he exclaimed, half to himself, but, of course, meaning Philip to hear; "I expected one, or, at most, two, quires of foolscap, and, behold! as much paper as goes to a family bible." Then he added, aloud—"Well—how much are we to get through at one sitting?"

"As much, or as little, as you like," said Philip, laughing; "I will read you a scene here and there; and when you are tired you can tell me."

"Don't fear. I shall not forget that," was the answer, as Philip seated himself at the table.

Who does not remember the nervous, choking sensation in the throat, when one was about to

read one's first composition to a relation ? No after ordeal among editors and publishers can ever come up to it. He arranged his papers —turned, and returned them, to find an effective part—and then glanced at Miles. He was comfortably seated in his easy chair, by the open window—his hands folded over his ample waistcoat, and his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, with an expression of mock resignation, very trying to a young author. His feet were outstretched in an attitude of excessive ease ; and over his head he had thrown a large silk handkerchief—his usual prelude to falling asleep.

“Are you ready, uncle ?”

“Quite, Philip—the day is hot—and if I *should* go to sleep, you must wake me, and not be offended.”

And, at length, after clearing his throat twice, the boy began. Miles expected a great deal of nonsense about love and sentiment ; but Philip knew his taste too well, to choose such scenes—even had there been much about

love in his work, which there was not. He selected a portion of the book, where the workings of an erring, but originally noble nature, were developed ; and there was a vigour, and truthfulness in the way this character was brought out, of which Miles, who had seen so much of life, was fully able to judge ; for, although he knew nothing of books, he was well versed in the darker parts of human nature.

The description was one of a youth, who, by slow and gradual stages, becomes a gambler ; for years plays—as men term it—with honour ; and, at length, in a moment of uncontrollable temptation, makes another downward transition, and is a felon. Then he analysed, at some length, the passion which had led the youth on into crime, and painted minutely its terrible pleasures and irresistible fascinations. A passage or two may be quoted, as giving some idea of the general style.

“ The love of gambling,” he read, “ is more intense than was ever the love for woman—

more intoxicating—more fervid—and, actually, in its deeds of self-abnegation, more heroic. With the mere vile end of gold for the reward,—what blind and boundless sacrifice, what changeless courage, what unfailing ardour is evinced in the pursuit! The true gambler conquers or falls, with the coldness of the stoic—passing, in an hour, from the highest to the lowest grades of society, without a change of features. Still, hanging over the green cloth, where the demon of play enchains him—he experiences in one night, every vicissitude of our life. First king—then slave—he leaps over, in one bound, the enormous space that separates these two men in the scale of human existence. What will he be when he leaves this fevered den—a prince, or a beggared outcast? weighed down with countless gold, or despoiled of the last poor gem which glitters on his hand? He knows not—he scarcely cares. For, after all, it is *not* the lust of gold which chains him to his consuming life. It is the loathing of repose, and love of the fierce excitement, caused by these

eternal gains and losses. Gold becomes his life—his mistress—his one desire—his avenging fiend—his God—and yet it is not gold for its own sake that he covets. This ceaseless combat for a shadow, no sooner caught than it again eludes his grasp, and which he loses almost with pleasure, that he may recommence the struggle, is to him, at length, as the very breath of his nostrils. In time, he has no other life but this life; every softer feeling of his nature is sacrificed to the infernal fever that consumes him. Love—self-esteem—friendship—even the blandishments of mere sensual pleasure—what are they to him, whose delight it is to make his own heart throb with agony, his blood boil, his brain reel madly; who throws his life—his fortune—his honour away, at one throw of the dice—or risks them, piece by piece, in a slower and more exquisite torture? What are the excitements of our life to him?—puerile and childish.

“The ocean could as soon sink into eternal

calm—the eagle be happy without wings—as he return to the peaceful monotony of common existence. Oh ! what patriots would have lived for their country alone—what lovers have sacrificed their life and honour for their mistress—if the same fire had ever burnt in their breasts, which lights up the hollow eye of the gambler!"

Philip went on reading several pages ; at length he stopped, and stole a glance at his uncle. He was not asleep—his eyes were fixed intently upon the boy's face, his head bent forward in a listening attitude, and the handkerchief lying unheeded upon the floor.

"Are you tired, uncle?"

"No."

"Shall I go on?"

"No. Philip, answer me one thing, and truly ; how did you learn all you have just read to me?—where did you get your experience of a gambler's life and feelings ? From what you have read—or—but, no, it is impossible that you could have seen such things at your age."

"Uncle," returned Philip, quietly, "I cannot tell you how I learn anything that I write; as you say, it cannot be from my own experience, and I have read so few novels that I do not think I have borrowed much from them. I suppose, in this case, it must partly be from what I have read and heard, but much more from imagining what *must* be the state of a man's mind under one powerful and all-engrossing passion. Further than this, I cannot explain how or why I have written."

Miles looked in the frank young face, and believed him. He was shrewd, and not without ability, of a certain kind, himself; and, though Philip's was of a higher and very different order, he was able to recognize the youth's dawning talent at once. But he paid him few compliments.

"I do not deny, Philip, that I am altogether surprised at what I have heard of your writing. You shall begin this evening, and read the whole work to me through. After-

wards, I suppose you will publish it Well, I never thought you would end in being an author."

The readings were long, often extending until after midnight—for old Miles grew more interested in the plot than he acknowledged—and, when it was finished, he was as anxious as Philip about the publication; adding, at last—

"And, I believe, after all, it may be as well to publish it under your own name."

In a few weeks the book was in the press.

Philip had small difficulty to contend with at the commencement of his literary career. Had he been any ordinary youth of eighteen, struggling on without friends or fortune, his talents would have undoubtedly remained the same, but his success might have been different—I mean the success of his first work, not his ultimate fame as an author—and therein lies a great distinction. The rugged path to be toiled up in early youth—the neglect at first—the harsh

criticism—the slowly-dawning fame, are the very circumstances which have braced up and fostered many a youthful genius; while, on the other hand, there is scarcely a more perilous test of real worth, than for a first work to be brought out under all the accidental advantages of a name and fortune, excellent publishers, and friendly critics. But the result at the time is unquestionably far pleasanter.

At eighteen, Philip found himself a successful author—a lion in London society; with as great a share of adulation, and as many pretty women ready to be in love with him, as might have turned many an older head. He was naturally no coxcomb, and became as little one as was perhaps possible; but no handsome young author, courted as he was, could remain long free from the pernicious effects of such a life; one of the greatest evils of which was, that his mind, instead of the quiet and repose necessary after the feverish haste in which his first book was written, was kept in a constant whirl of excitement, when it should have been

acquiring new and healthy vigour for its next labours. At the end of another year, however, he again published. The success of the work was great—perhaps, greater than had been the former one—but it was a false success this time—that of society. In the world the book was indiscriminately praised, its faults, which were many, were unnoticed, and the really true and beautiful parts overlooked. Only a few grave critics were more sparing in their praises than before; and hinted that if the third work of the young author were again as intrinsically poorer, as was this one, compared to the first, his literary career would be over. Philip felt the truth of these remarks deeply, and resolved to profit by them, and withdraw himself awhile from the noisy world of London, ere he again attempted to compose.

Miles gladly seconded his intention; for all Philip's success and engagements had naturally deprived his uncle of much of his society, and they were both looking forward, with pleasure, to spending some quiet months at

a place of Mr. Earnscliffe's, far away in the north of England, when a new train of events arose, which altered their plans, and coloured the whole of Philip's after life.

When he again wrote, it was to be under very different circumstances.

CHAPTER V.

PHILIP EARNSCLIFFE was already looked upon as one of the best *partis* in London. Joined to all his own attractions, he was the acknowledged heir of one of the richest men in England ; and many a wily mother and innocent daughter had combined their united snares around him. But Philip, although he had had a dozen admirations, had never fallen in love. Perhaps, he had as yet had no time to do so ; or, more likely, he had been thinking too much of himself, to bestow undivided attention upon any other object. However this might be, he only laughed, when his uncle used to ask him, at breakfast, ‘ What

silly face he had become enamoured of, the evening before?’—and always said he should have no time to think of marrying, for the next ten years, at least. He little knew how near his fate was upon him.

One of the houses at which he was the most intimate, was that of Lord St. Leger, his maternal uncle. The noble lord was himself as disagreeable a person as you will often meet with, and possessed scarcely an idea beyond his own dignity and the dice-box, while of principle he was most singularly and entirely void. His wife was not a whit inferior to himself in coldness of heart—or, rather, in the complete absence of what common people term natural affection. She had, however, a fair, kindly face—a plausible manner—a soft voice, and was generally spoken of as a very charming woman indeed. Few claims to popularity go deeper !

They had only one child, a daughter; and Lady Clara St. Leger inherited many of the qualities of both her parents—although these

were, of course, somewhat glossed over by her youth and personal attractions. She was several years older than Philip, and had already attained the age of five-and-twenty—an age at which most girls, in her position, would have been some years married. But, although she had had several offers—and one lover—none of her suitors had been considered eligible, either by herself or her parents.

Time wore on, however, and every year Lord St. Leger became more anxious for his daughter to marry a wealthy man. Beneath his cold, white, unmeaning face, lurked the fire of many an evil passion ; and the gambling-table had long been making fearful inroads upon a fortune already crippled with youthful extravagance.

Lady St. Leger was equally desirous that Clara should make a distinguished marriage ; but she had always looked less to mere money than to high birth and position, until one day, when her husband abruptly acquainted her with the darkening state of his own

affairs ; adding, coarsely, “ and it would be well, madam, for you to make a last effort to marry your daughter, or I reckon she will have little chance soon of finding a husband at all. Unless something very unforeseen occurs, you may look forward, in the course of the present year, to being the wife of a beggar.”

Lady St. Leger pondered deeply over this fearful intelligence—the most fearful that can be conceived to a heartless woman of the world. The prospect of poverty was, to her, the prospect of disgrace, loss of position, influence in society—all that constituted her life. Without domestic affections, resources in herself, or religion, she looked upon a beggared future as far worse than death itself ; and, with a desperate determination, she resolved to marry Clara at once. She felt that upon that alone hung their last chance. But to whom ? She turned over in her mind all the men who had ever shown her daughter any attention, and even those who had not ;

and as, one by one, the most eligible rose before her, she felt that Clara, at five-and-twenty, had small prospect of succeeding where she had failed at eighteen : she was getting somewhat thin, of late, and had not had too many partners at balls during the present season. Suddenly a new thought flashed across Lady St. Leger ; she half smiled, and deliberated long—but the deliberation seemed, at last, favourable, and her thin lips parted disdainfully, as she muttered aloud—“Well, I suppose it must be so—I must marry my daughter to young Earnscliffe.”

Later in the day she sought for Clara, and found her alone in the drawing-room. She was neither working nor reading, but sitting in the twilight, with her eyes fixed upon the fire, and her hands lying listlessly in her lap. She was paler even than usual ; and her long light hair, thrown back from her face, revealed lines which had already lost the rounded contour of early youth. Lady St. Leger looked at her for a few seconds, and then, ap-

proaching noiselessly, laid her hand on her shoulder.

“Clara.”

“Yes, mother.”

She never turned her head.

“What are you thinking of, child, sitting alone in the dark?”

“I was thinking of Harry, mother.”

“Of Harry!” returned the other, with cold contempt. “Well, I should not have expected that my daughter would think of Harry Douglas again, after the lapse of eight years. A poor penniless young sailor, who presumed to talk to you of marriage!”

“Aye, is it not ridiculous?” she replied, with a bitter laugh. “For I refused him—at your bidding, certainly—but also through my own pride. And for eight years—you remember rightly, mother—I have planned, and plotted, and acted, in the hope of becoming the wife of a dozen other men, and have not succeeded. And now—a worn, wearied woman—I can yet think of him and of my girl-

hood, and shed tears for both, as I have done to-day. But I do not feel that I shall shed many more."

She clasped her hands upon her knees—bowed her head upon them—and was silent.

"Clara," resumed her mother, after a pause, "listen to me. You have been a dutiful daughter, hitherto"—she moved, impatiently—"and have never opposed my wishes. Now, the very existence of your father and myself may depend upon you. Our affairs, it matters not how or why, are in the most desperate condition, and to your marriage alone can we look for help. If you were to marry a man of property, we might yet——"

"Well!" said Clara, suddenly looking up, "I understand you. Who is it to be—what happy man am I this time to try to win for my husband?"

Her mother even was rather taken aback, at her hard, cold manner—but she soon recovered her composure; and turning her face a little aside, answered quietly—

“ Your cousin Philip.”

“ Philip Earnscliffe ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Mother, are you dreaming ? Why should I marry that boy ? Surely you do not care for his handsome face, or his genius ?” she added, with a sneer.

“ Clara—Philip’s uncle is the wealthiest commoner in England. His nephew is, certainly, only his presumptive heir, still, every chance is in his favour. Old Earnscliffe would probably make handsome settlements—and, at all events, it is the best *parti* you have any chance of making, and he will be easily won.”

“ He is not likely, with his poet’s fancies, to fall in love with me.”

“ At twenty, a vain youth will fall in love with any woman who shows a preference for him. Leave everything to me, my darling ; only act as I wish you, and in a few weeks you will be Miles Earnscliffe’s niece.”

“ And *his* wife. Well, as you will —his or

another's, it is all the same. Only one thing, mother—get it over as quickly as you can, and let me have as little to do with it as possible." And once more she sunk into her old listless attitude. Her mother pressed a kiss upon her forehead, and then, quite delighted at Clara's acquiescence, fluttered gaily out of the room.

Thus was Philip's marriage projected.

Lady St. Leger was naturally a clever woman. Long experience in the world had given her an extensive knowledge of the foibles of human nature, and she had an in-born talent for scheming and manœuvring. It would not be interesting to the reader to follow her minutely in the way she plotted for Philip. The crowning scene of her endeavours, it will be enough to relate.

One day, about a week after the interview with her daughter, Philip was to dine with them alone. He frequently did so, partly on the score of relationship, partly because he rather liked his cousin's society. In spite of her pale face and moodiness, there was some-

thing about her which interested him ; although she was certainly the last woman in the world with whom he could have fallen in love. In her calm, sensible, conversation he found a pleasant contrast to the blooming, exuberantly happy, and excessively amiable young ladies he generally met with in the world. Clara rather liked him, too, in her own cold way ; and, looking upon her cousin as one she would at least never be called upon to win, her manner with him had always been friendly and natural.

Philip found Lady St. Leger alone in the drawing-room. She received him affectionately, and made many enquiries for his uncle ; but, after these first customary greetings were over, he perceived that she was silent and abstracted. Her face was averted from him ; and, occasionally, she sighed, as if unconscious of his presence.

“ You are not well, I fear,” he said, kindly, “ or something has occurred to depress you.”

She raised a little mask of deep lace to her

eyes—that action being considered a symbol of feminine agitation—and was silent. Philip became interested, and pressed her for a reply.

“Ah, Philip!” she cried, seizing his hand—her own was still white and soft as a girl’s—“none but a mother can know how I suffer. I feel that it is imprudent; but I cannot conceal it, even from you—the sad truth has broken upon me so suddenly. After watching the infancy of an only child, seeing her grow up to womanhood, and never once in her life having breathed a reproving word to her, now, in the brightness of her youth, to know that she is pining, altering day by day—oh! Philip, my heart will break under it!” and the lace was again in requisition.

“Is Clara—is my cousin ill?” he enquired, anxiously.

“Yes, she is ill, and with a worse malady than any bodily ailment. Philip, for some months I have perceived that she was restless and unsettled; she has cared less for society; her gay cheerfulness has decreased” (Philip

never remembered her being very cheerful), “her cheeks have grown pale; and yet, when I have questioned her upon her health, she has always replied, ‘she was well—quite well—quite happy.’ But a mother is not so easily deceived. I have watched more closely every indication of her feelings, and, at length, only two days ago, an accident discovered to me my poor darling’s secret. Clara—oh! how can I tell you—you of all others?”—her voice sank until it was scarcely audible—“my child is the victim of a deep, and too much, I fear, unreturned attachment.”

“Good heavens! how little I should have supposed it possible! Believe me, dear Lady St. Leger, I fully sympathize with you in your anxiety—but what man can be insensible to the preference of so gentle a being as Clara?”

Philip had not the slightest idea which way his afflicted relative was drifting. He only felt real concern at Lady St. Leger’s communication, not unmixed with astonishment that

she had selected him for a confidant on such a very delicate subject as her daughter's unrequited love ; while the lady's inward reflection was, " Stupid creature ! I shall have to tell him in so many words."

" I cannot tell you more ; perhaps, I have already said too much. I believe it would kill my poor child, if she thought I had revealed her secret—and to you ; for, once, when I remarked upon her altered looks, and said I must ask you to cheer her with some of your bright poet thoughts, she exclaimed, ' Not him, mother !—not one word to my cousin, or I shall die !'—and her very lips turned ashy pale. Oh ! Philip, it was then that I first suspected the cruel truth. But, hush ! here she comes !"—and, at that moment, the door slowly opened, and Clara entered.

She was dressed in white, with only a bouquet of natural moss-roses in her bosom, and looked younger and fresher than usual—with her long pale hair falling in a cloud upon her transparently fair neck, and a somewhat

heightened colour in her face. When she saw her mother and Philip alone together, the colour deepened to a crimson blush, and she averted her head, as they shook hands.

The last words of Lady St. Leger had caused an extremely painful sensation to Philip ; and Clara's evident embarrassment, at seeing him, only confirmed his half-formed fear, that he was the object of her attachment.

Although she was not a girl he could love, she was gentle, and certainly pretty ; and he had always felt a kind of pity for her companionless life. Nothing could have given more sincere pain than the idea which had been forced upon his mind ; and he allowed Lady St. Leger to talk on without reply, while he became as silent and embarrassed as his cousin. Lord St. Leger, however, soon entered, and dinner was announced, Lady St. Leger whispering to him as he handed her to the dining room—

“ Not a word—not a look—as you value my poor darling's happiness.”

The meal passed off slowly. Lord St. Leger was out of temper, as usual, and spoke little. Clara was perfectly silent ; and, although Lady St. Leger and Philip exerted themselves to talk their conversation was evidently constrained.

Soon after the ladies had left the table, his uncle begged Philip to excuse him, saying, he had an engagement which obliged his attendance ; so Earnscliffe was compelled to join his aunt and cousin in the drawing-room. But he had a gloomy feeling—a sort of presentiment of evil—upon his spirits, and he would much sooner have left the house.

He found Clara alone. She was seated by a small table, at the further end of the room, apparently intent upon the book she was reading. As he approached, his heart fluttered slightly at seeing it was one of his own works. He was too young to be insensible to the attachment of any woman ; and his cousin had never appeared to him so interesting before.

“ I wish you had a better book to study, Clara,” he said, with rather a forced smile.

She turned and looked at him—that fixed, steady look, which, had he lived longer, he might have known no woman could bestow upon the man she loved—and again a deep, painful blush overspread her face, colouring even her neck and arms. How should he know that it was a blush of burning shame? There was but one way to interpret her confusion, after the half-confession of her mother; and it was an interpretation too flattering to his vanity to be doubted. She loved him. Poor Philip felt himself getting rather confused, too; and seated himself quite close to her, without knowing exactly what he was about.

Clara bent over her book again and sighed—no acted sigh—whatever her emotion at that moment, it was real; although it arose not from love to her cousin. She felt that her mother had spoken; and all the lingering pride of her girlhood was warring against the worldly obedience to which she had been trained. When she looked in Philip's bright,

young face, too, she felt more than her usual disgust at the part she was acting. This time she was not trying to win a mere man of the world, but to deceive a frank and truthful nature. She remembered him as the one friend she had ever possessed since her childhood; and, even now, the thought of speaking openly to him, and saving them both, struggled in her bosom.

“ You are ill, dear Clara ! your colour changes every minute !”

He took her hand ; and was shocked at the clammy, death-like touch.

“ Not ill, Philip. I am ill in mind only. Cousin,” her cheeks were again on fire, “ I fear my mother has spoken to you—my mother——”

But her proud lip could not speak those humiliating words, and quivered with agitation as she vainly tried to continue.

Unhappily for himself, poor Philip was too generous to allow her to do so. He reflected not, that, on a few words of his, the after-

colouring of his whole life might depend ; and that, in saving her a passing humiliation, he was about to sacrifice himself for ever, without one warmer feeling than pity in his heart. He only saw a broken-hearted girl, trying, with pale, trembling lips, to exonerate herself in his eyes for having given him her love unasked, and all the noblest feelings of his nature were awakened. Throwing his arms around her, he whispered, before she could speak another word—

“ Oh, Clara ! confide all your sorrow to me —for I love you.”

She had not then the principle to withdraw, though she shuddered in his embrace ; and the recollection of the warm love she had once known for Harry Douglas came like a mockery to her, even at that moment, when, with a selfish, unbeating heart, she was about to give herself for life to another. Her cold lips were pressed unresistingly to Philip’s ; and he poured forth passionate words, which, in the excitement of the moment, he actually himself believed were genuine.

When Lady St. Leger entered the room, after a reasonably long time had elapsed, her delighted eyes beheld them standing together near the fire—Clara's face deeply flushed, and her eyes cast down, and her companion speaking in low but animated tones, with her hand clasped in his.

It was late that evening when Philip found himself on his way home, excessively bewildered at all that had passed, and the accepted suitor of Lord St. Leger's daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

It would be difficult to describe Mr. Earncliffe's feelings on hearing of Philip's sudden engagement to his cousin.

Of course, he flew into a great passion at first, and refused point-blank to give his consent, saying 'the boy had been decoyed, inveigled, taken in.' But this he would have considered it a sort of duty to do, whatever project of marriage had been formed by his nephew without his own advice. On cooling down, and reflecting more calmly, however, the leading weakness of the old man's nature

was immensely flattered at the idea of the St. Legers—the proudest people amongst the whole English nobility—catching eagerly at *his* heir.

It had always been his secret hope that Philip would one day marry into a noble family, and thus unite in his posterity his own hardly-earned wealth with aristocratic blood. As he thought over it he became gradually more reconciled to his nephew marrying so young; and, at length, grew really friendly to the match, although he made himself thoroughly disagreeable to everybody, long after he had, in his own mind, determined to consent.

Lady St. Leger's expectations, however, of handsome settlements, on the part of old Miles, were grievously disappointed. A few days after he had given his tardy consent to the engagement, Philip hinted delicately that it was probable his future father-in-law would be desirous of an interview, on business, with him.

"Then, let him come here, Phil; I am quite ready to tell him my intentions towards you, and I hope his daughter's prospects are one-tenth part as good as your own—though I much doubt it."

Philip thought it would be well for his uncle to wait upon Lord St. Leger—Miles did not.

"Not a bit of it—it is all their doing! They want to marry into my family, not I into theirs. You know," he added, maliciously, "the proposal was not made in my drawing-room, after dinner. Don't distress yourself, Phil; your noble father-in-law will find out his way to me, when money is to be talked of, without our assistance."

And he was right. Two days afterwards, the proudest gentleman in England was standing nervously in old Miles's study for half an hour, waiting to see him, while Miles finished his luncheon.

"Don't fret yourself, Phil," he remarked, as he leisurely rose from the table; "my lord has had patience, I have no doubt."

When he entered the study, Lord St. Leger advanced warmly to meet him—

“ My dear sir — ”

“ How are you? Pray sit down, and we will at once begin the business you have come upon.”

“ Your health, my dear Mr. Earnscliffe?”

“ Is excellent, my lord. I am as clear in my head as I was fifty years ago, when I started life the lowest clerk in a merchant’s office. You are aware that I am a self-made man, Lord St. Leger. Without birth, connexion, or any advantages but my own brain and perseverance, I became what I am. Pray seat yourself, and we will enter into accounts at once. As you are the young lady’s father, and I am only Philip’s uncle, you will, perhaps, first have the goodness to state the settlements you propose making upon your daughter, and I will then tell you my own intentions towards my nephew.”

Lord St. Leger’s face had grown several shades more sallow than even its usual cada-

verous hue, during Miles Earnscliffe's little speech. The old merchant, with spiteful pleasure, had purposely recalled his own humble origin, and made his noble companion feel, to the full, the true position in which they stood to each other. It was with an immense effort that he swallowed his proud indignation, and brought out a few common-place remarks—very courteous ones, but not at all in answer to Miles's question.

"But the figure, my lord?" he said, sharply, drawing an immense sheet of blue paper before him, and placing his pen in the extreme left-hand corner, as though the whole page would be required to note down Lord St. Leger's magnificent intentions. "I am a plain man, as you know; and, though I have greatly objected to the whole thing—thinking Phil, with his unsettled position and love of society, far too young, *and* unsteady, my lord, to marry — yet, as everybody else seems bent upon it, and the poor boy feels his honour engaged — may I trouble

you to pass the ink?—thank you—feels his honour engaged—why, I have given my consent. And the only thing now, is for you and me to decide upon the settlements, and let them marry; and, considering my objections to the engagement from the first, I think I am now acting generously in meeting you half way about the money.”

Lord St. Leger bowed and smiled. He was bland and courteous, made vague promises, and commented largely upon the other's well-known riches and generosity; but it was all to no avail. Nothing led Miles, for one moment, from their actual business; and, after his lordship's most flattering speeches and graceful perorations, he invariably returned to the original question—

“Then, what amount will you settle upon your daughter?”

At length, after as many wily turns and fine-sounding phrases, ‘signifying nothing,’ as would have done credit to a Vienna note, Lord St. Leger was beaten. Brought to the

actual point—but still with an attempt at dignity—the answer came out.

‘In the present state of the country—the difficulty of getting rents—and some slight embarrassments of his own, which would, he trusted, soon be over, he could give his daughter—nothing.’

“Very well, my lord,” said Miles, with one of his pleasantest smiles, and carefully replacing his unsullied paper in a portfolio; “then I believe our conversation is at an end. I had proposed to settle the same sum as yourself upon your daughter, I will do so now—and it rests with you that the amount is so small. With regard to my nephew, I have long since made my will, and at my death he will inherit all my property. His marriage—should the projected union still be carried out—will not alter my intentions towards him, poor fellow! and during my life-time I shall allow him what I consider sufficient—not more. It is well that he should also depend upon his own exertions.”

Lord St. Leger rose—his face livid with rage at his utter failure—but his presence of mind still not forsaking him. At that moment of supreme disappointment, he felt that it were better to marry his daughter to Philip, although without settlements, than not to marry her at all; and, taking Earnscliffe's hand, he expressed with dignified composure his regret that he was not able to act as he himself wished, on the solemn occasion of his only child's marriage—thanking him at the same time for his generous intention of making settlements equivalent to his own, upon Clara. And so, with still a calm exterior, but in his bosom a very hell of hatred towards his future connections, he left the room.

"I knew how it would be," muttered Miles after he was gone. "They are selling their nobility for my money—and poor Philip is just to be thrown in, as the least important part of the bargain. Hang the fellow! with his white, deceitful face, and glib words. He was as difficult to be brought to speak as

an attorney. And his promises, and his grand words, and his inquiries about my health—my health ! ho, ho !—when he would like to see me drop down dead on the wedding-day ! However, I will say one thing for him—he behaved like a gentleman."

It is not necessary to speak much of Philip's courtship. Having got into the entanglement, he tried hard to make himself believe that he had done so wisely, and of his own free will. He consequently endeavoured to be in love ; and then—finding the task somewhat tedious—only wished the whole thing were over. He was young and hopeful, and life for him held out so wide a field for ambition ;—he saw before him such long years of success in the world, that his marriage did not appear an all-important event. He had never felt anything of love beyond mere boyish fancies, on that vague yearning for ideal beauty which is part of a poet's temperament, and any idea of domestic happiness had never crossed his mind. He was fond of society, where he shone supreme—those re-

fined circles of the great London world, to which he had universal *entrée*; but he also delighted—and who does not at twenty?—in another society, far more brilliant and less restrained, that of artists and actors. Those delightful *petits soupers*, after the opera, where all was mirth and laughter, and of which he had not yet learned to weary; the rehearsals—the pretty faces that all smiled upon him; in short, all the mimic but exciting life of the green-room.

It would have taken a passionate love, a most sweet and winning wife, to convert Philip Earnscliffe, at twenty, into a domestic husband. And he married Lady Clara St. Leger.

The preliminaries of the marriage were speedily got over. There was no reluctance of the bride, no tearful wishes for delay on the part of the bride's mother; and the bridegroom, if not ardent about his marriage, appeared extremely anxious for the termination of his courtship.

Mr. Earnscliffe, after all, made the young

couple a handsome allowance, and they took a furnished house in Park Lane for the coming season.

By tacit consent neither of them spoke of any tour after their marriage. Their honeymoon was to be passed at the estate in Yorkshire, whither Miles and Philip had talked of going previous to his engagement; and afterwards they were immediately to return to London. Philip seemed suddenly to have given up all his intention of solitude and improvement, and to think more of society than ever; and Clara remained passive whatever was planned for the future.

The wedding-day came, and they were married. Lord and Lady St. Leger showed the proper amount of feeling at the touching event, although the bride was cold and tearless. There was a profusion of silver and orange flowers, school-children with baskets of fady-looking green leaves, and pretty bridesmaids, and meaningless young men, and pompous old relations. Speeches were made,

and healths drank ; and the bride's mother kissed the bridegroom, who appeared uneasy and nervous, as though he were just beginning to realize the meaning of what he had been about. Old Miles, in a blue coat and gilt buttons of antique workmanship, looked exceedingly out of his place, and made sarcastic remarks to everybody. And so the happy morning went off ; and the bridal pair departed ; and the guests after them : and the father and mother were left alone, to think over their daughter's marriage.

Miles drove back to his house, about ten miles from town—the house in which he had first received little Philip—and the remainder of the day hung heavily upon him.

He walked about his gardens with less interest than usual, and at six he sat down to his lonely dinner. It was, of course, a thing of frequent occurrence for him to dine alone ; but then he always knew that Philip was enjoying himself in the world, and thought of all the good stories he would tell him at

breakfast next morning ; for Philip knew the pleasure this gave his uncle, and never failed in being punctual at the morning meal. Now it was different ; his life was again to be lonely, and for ever. Philip might come as his guest—but that was all ; he was married, and every other tie would be broken.

After dinner he sat long by the fire ; and, as he watched the red logs sparkle, his memory recalled that winter evening when the little, bright-haired child, first appeared at his lonely hearth. He traced all his young life since then—his childhood, which had made the silent house so joyous with his shouts, and laughter, and thousand affectionate, winning ways—his holidays, made happy at Christmas with his skating and sledging, and noisy indoor-games,—even happier at midsummer, when Miles took him to the sea-side, and used to sit on the beach, watching the boy swimming, delighted, over the smooth summer sea. Then he thought of the unexpected outbreak of Philip's genius—his success in the world- his

own gratified pride in his nephew's distinction—and he felt he had never known how much he loved him till now.

"And I let him marry that idiot's pale-faced daughter!" he exclaimed, bitterly, aloud, "for her rank and birth, as though *they* would make his home happy, when I might have prevented the whole thing by one word of disinheriting him. Married, and not yet one-and-twenty—my poor boy!"

He remained long, looking vacantly at the fire; and, at length, tears gathered slowly in the old man's eyes. They were the only ones shed on Philip's wedding-day.

CHAPTER VII.

ALONE in the country in the depths of winter, Philip found his honeymoon amply long enough to awaken him to a true sense of the error he had committed. He soon saw that he had allowed himself to be drawn into marriage with a woman to whom he was indifferent; while, before he had been married many days, doubts had already dawned upon his mind as to the real motive of Clara, in becoming his wife. When he was relieved from the necessity of constantly acting love himself, he had time to observe her more closely; and he was forced to admit that her cheeks were just as pale—

her spirits as dull—now that she was his wife, as they had been six weeks before, when her mother represented her as pining under a hopeless attachment.

Was it possible, he asked himself, that she had acted with duplicity, and married him without love, only because he was his uncle's heir? The thought filled him with ineffable disgust. He was far too proud to recriminate, or demand any explanation—so he remained silent; but, in these first days of married life—so rarely ruffled by suspicion—a feeling of estrangement had already risen in Philip's heart towards his wife.

Besides this, *he* was in the very brightness of life and youth; and there was something excessively irksome to him in Clara's cold, silent companionship. For what had appeared gentleness in a cousin, was very insipid in a wife. She could neither warm into admiration at his conversation—which, to all others, had so rare a charm—nor share in his enthusiastic visions for the future. A monosyllable—a

quickly-fading smile—was her usual reply ; and the bridegroom soon longed impatiently for the termination of those endless thirty days, which, according to the laws of English society, it is necessary for newly-married persons to spend in banishment.

“ Are you fond of the country, Clara ? ” he asked, the night before their journey home-wards, as the long winter-evening passed slowly by.

He had been reading ; she gazing in the fire (it was a peculiarity of Lady Clara’s, that she never worked) ; and a sufficiently long time had elapsed without either of them speaking a word.

“ I—when I was quite young,”—how the expression jarred upon Philip’s ear—“ I greatly preferred the country ; I think, then, I should have liked to remain for ever among the Highlands of Scotland, which I happened to visit, when I was about seventeen,” her face grew soft, for a moment, at the recollection ; “ but, after that, I returned to London—I was pre-

sented—and since, I have, of course, been so continually in society, that I have never had time to think of a country life; for, even in the country, at Christmas, one has as much gaiety as in town."

"And now?"

"Now? Oh, of course, you prefer being in London—do you not?"

"But for yourself?"

"For myself, I am indifferent." And the conversation closed.

She *was* indifferent to almost everything now. With her marriage had ended even her old friendship for Philip; she knew well that he did not love her, and she could not forget the unworthy manner in which he had been won. It was a perpetual wound to her pride, and she cared not that her manner betrayed the coldness of her feelings; indeed, she preferred her husband should no longer believe her more attached to him than she was in reality.

It was a relief to both when they returned to London. The train arrived late in the

evening ; and Philip hailed the fog and smoke and Babel-sounds which greeted him, as so many familiar friends. He was quite in good spirits during dinner, and laughed and talked with all his old manner. They had found scores of invitations awaiting them ; for himself, notes from his old acquaintances, theatrical announcements, communications from his publishers—he seemed to have returned to life.

“ You look tired, Clara, after your journey,” he remarked, kindly, when they returned to the drawing-room, “ and are not equal, probably, to the fatigue of going out ; otherwise, there is a new opera to-night.”

“ Shall you go ?” she asked, with a faint indication of surprise.

“ Well, dearest, I have so much news to hear, that I must just go down to the club”—

Although only married a month, a marital intuition made him feel that it was as well to suppress, ‘ and to the opera afterwards.’

“ Then, good night,” she answered, with

abrupt coldness. “I am tired, and shall retire to rest at once.”

She left the room without another word. One look of entreaty—if she had thrown her arms round his neck, and whispered, “Ah! Philip, do not leave me alone so soon,” he would have stayed; but her cold, almost insulting manner of wishing him good night stung him deeply.

“She wishes to treat me like a boy,” was his thought; and he went off to his club.

Clara heard the street door shut loudly after him, while she was still slowly ascending the staircase. She felt really weary and sick at heart, and when she entered her room, did not ring for her maid. She wished to be alone, and seating herself before the dressing-table, she gazed long at the reflection of her own face in the glass; she looked pale, tired, and not youthful.

“And thus begins my new life!” she said, at length, aloud. “Married to a mere boy—who took me from pity, and, after a month,

leaves me alone to seek his former amusements on the first night of our return; without love in my own heart, and loathing myself for having married him;—these are the conditions of my existence—my prospects for the future. But you succeeded, mother; you have married me to Miles Earnscliffe's heir!"

She nerved herself proudly, and, turning from the glass, walked up and down the room, while her lips trembled, and occasionally her hands clenched involuntarily. Few who knew her in the world, would have believed her capable of passionate emotion like this; but though worldly and selfish, she had still some of a woman's deepest feelings left. Little as she cared for her husband, his carelessness to her, on the first evening of their return home, had aroused all her pride, and with it the never-dying thoughts of her first lover—that recollection which was the avenging ghost of the youth and love she had so pitilessly crushed in her own bosom. She saw herself as she was—her ambitious plans successful,

married to a man whom every girl in London had been anxious to win ; and then thought what she might have been, had she, eight years ago, followed the honest dictates of her heart. It was a bitter thought.

Suddenly, she paused in her hurried walk, and unlocked a case, which stood upon the dressing-table. Within, lay a perfect mass of jewels—diamonds, pearls, emeralds, the costly wedding presents, mostly given her by her husband and his uncle. They only reminded her that for them, and the wealth which bought them, she had married Philip, and she pushed them aside with disgust—paused a few seconds—and then touching, with a somewhat faltering hand, the spring of a hidden drawer, drew from it, what appeared, from the care with which it was preserved, to be a treasured relic. It was only a little sprig of mountain heather, now colourless and withered with time ; but worth more to the unhappy woman, than a thousand such glittering heaps, as lay before her. For it had been plucked by

Harry Douglas, on the first day he had ever spoken to her of love, in that lonely highland glen, whose rocks and heath covered-banks, she had never been able to forget ; and, once more, she heard the throstle singing, and the wild bee humming past her, as on that very summer morning. She looked long at it—with that eager recalling look, such as a mother may bestow upon some relic of the babe she lost in her youth—but yet she did not raise it to her lips, or utter one tender word. She tried to remember that she had herself discarded him, and was now the wife of another man ; and, at length—with a supreme effort, but still tearless eyes—returned it to its hiding place.

Then she seated herself in a chair before the fire, and covered her face with her hands. She remained long so—thinking again and again, that humiliating thought—“he took me from a feeling of pity, not of love, and forsakes me already.” She traced clearly her future position in the world—unattractive,

sick,—her health was delicate—without interest, in anything, and married to a man five years younger than herself, in reality—but a whole life time in feeling—a man sought for by all London—brilliant, fond of excitement and society, all that she had wearied of, and outlived.

She remained long motionless; then rang for her maid, and retired to rest composed, and tearless. But, when midnight passed, and she heard the early morning hours strike, one by one, and still Philip did not return, her calmness, at length forsook her, and she burst into a long and passionate flood of tears.

Philip found a warm reception everywhere. At the club, he made a dozen engagements—most of them, to bachelor parties; although, he at first said, laughing, he could not think of accepting them now that he was a married man—heard all the newest town gossip—and then went off with some of his friends, to the opera, where they were still in time for the two last acts. As he took his accustomed

place in the stalls, he was greeted with smiles from all quarters of the house; for his marriage had only spoilt him in the eyes of a few manœuvring mothers and their daughters; and, with this exception, all his fair friends were as delighted to see him as ever.

A new dancer was to make her first appearance that evening; so Philip had not the courage to leave before the ballet, as he had otherwise intended. He thought he would just wait to see her—and then return home. The *débutante* was charming, and Philip's applause unbounded—he forgot time, and home, and, Clara, while watching the exquisitely graceful movements of this young girl, who was of surpassing loveliness ; and he almost started when, at length, the ballet terminated in a flood of rose-light, and he was reminded that it was long past midnight. Of course, now that all attraction was over, Philip at once prepared to be off ; and he was attempting to pass quickly through the crowd, when in the lobby one of his friends approached, and shaking Earns-

cliffe's hand, gave him a little, delicately folded, pink note.

"In your old luck, Phil!" he whispered. "Upon my word, it is rather soon for a bridegroom to receive such wicked-looking missives. I suppose La Thionville spied you out from behind the scenes, for she wrote this note in great haste, and begged me, with tears in her eyes, to deliver it to you without fail. However, you may set your conscience at rest—there is nothing wrong in it, for Celeste read it to me as she wrote."

The note was written in a small, rather illegible hand, in French, and was as follows—

"CHER M. EARNSCLIFFE,

"Although you are married I suppose you will not desert all your old friends. Lord B_____, Neville, and a few others will sup with me to-night—we shall only want our poet to be complete. Do come to us.

"Votre amie,

"CELESTE."

Philip hesitated—"Not to-night," he said, "make my excuses to Celeste—another time—"

"Nonsense," returned Neville—he was a rising young artist, and an old school-friend of Philip's—"If we once allow you a precedent, we shall be always losing you, on the score of your new duties. Celeste tells me that she has got F_____, and B_____, and little Fridoline herself. We shall be a delightful party—not one stupid person—and you know you are not obliged to stop late." And taking Philip's arm, he led him off—it must be confessed, a not unwilling victim.

They drove in Earnscliffe's cab to La Thionville's pretty house in the Regent's Park, where all the guests were already assembled.

"I know I am welcome;" said Neville, on entering the drawing-room, "but not for my own sake. I have brought back an old friend to the land of the living"

The Frenchwoman gave a theatrical start on seeing Earnscliffe; then welcomed him

with real delight. She took his arm as they went down to supper, and said in a low tone—

“Ah, Philippe! I am so surprised and glad to see you. With all your English ideas, I feared we should not have you among us again, for a year at the very least.”

The party was brilliant; but Philip could not at first feel quite at his ease. He knew that it was not the sort of society for him to make his first appearance in, as a married man; and the remark of Celeste had unintentionally strengthened this feeling, so for a time he remained silent and constrained. But he was among people who would not let him long continue so. After trying in vain to make him talk, Celeste laughed maliciously, and asked if he was mentally composing a poem on the happiness of married life, to account for his silence.

“If he is,” cried little Fridoline, in her pretty English, “Monsieur Earnscliffe’s face is quite proof enough of his theory, without troubling himself to finish the poem!”

Celeste, then, looking at the time-piece, inquired till what hour he was permitted to remain ; as she would not suffer him in her house to stay one second longer ; and it soon ended by Philip, who tried in vain to be dignified, becoming as merry as his two fair neighbours.

It must be allowed that his position was a somewhat dangerous one. Celeste, on whose right he sat, she always reserved this place of honour for Philip—was a sparkling, animated brunette, of some age under thirty. She was not a first-rate singer ; but her acting was excellent. She was always natural, except off the stage—never over-strained—never vulgar —indeed, it was said Celeste was, by birth, a lady ; or, at least, in her early youth, had moved in good Parisian society. She had lived long in Italy, while studying her profession, before she appeared in England ; but she was French by birth, and had all the liveliness of her country-women—softened down by a slight shade of romantic sentiment, which, as she said, she

had ‘learnt’ in Italy. Doubtless, she had only ‘learnt’ it; but it became her mightily; and when her naturally laughing lips trembled a little, or her dark eyes filled with tears, Celeste was unquestionably fascinating. She always appeared well-off; and piqued herself greatly upon her house, her parties, and, above all, her wine, which, wonderful to say for an actress, was really good. She liked to collect, at her little suppers, all the cleverest men in London; for, though she never read anything herself but her *rôles*, she liked to be spoken of as patronizing genius; and, having once discovered that authors preferred talking of anything else better than of each other’s books, she was never afraid again of being bored with their conversation.

Among books, however, she made one exception. She read Philip’s. Perhaps she understood them; more probably she did not, for her knowledge of English was very superficial—but, at all events, she read them. She had made him write her name on the

title page of each, always had them lying on her table, with many of the least-remarkable passages marked in pencil ; and once or twice she told Philip she had ‘much weeped’ over parts he had rather intended to be the witty ones of the story. Celeste had always cherished a very romantic sentiment for the young author, and was quite cut up at his marriage, thinking that her parties would probably lose their best lion by this event, through some of those ‘detestable British prejudices.’ His reappearance, however, so soon at her house put her in the highest spirits ; and Celeste had never been more charming than she was that evening.

On Philip’s other side was ‘little Fridoline,’ at that time a very celebrated actress, and one whose mysterious appearance, and subsequent career, had become a subject of universal interest in London.

The success of this girl in one year had been, indeed, almost fabulous. Coming, no one could say whence—very young—with-

friends, or even acquaintances—she had been engaged at the French plays to act minor parts. But her extraordinary conception of character, and the original colouring she threw over the most trivial *rôle* she played were such, that, in a few weeks, hundreds crowded every night, merely to see Fridoline's acting as a *soubrette*. The manager saw that he had had a lucky find, promoted her at once, with a good salary, to first-rate characters, and her success in one season nearly made his fortune.

Although her French was excellent, and her pronunciation of it so true as to be sweet, even to a Parisian ear, she was not a French-woman. Some said she was German, some Danish, some Russian. When asked herself, she invariably answered that she had not the least idea—that she had no country, no relation, no other name than Fridoline; and the utmost perseverance could win from her no further reply.

In person she was small and fair, with a

profusion of waving golden hair, and large eyes, of the deepest hazel, with very black eyelashes. She was too singular-looking to be exactly beautiful, although it was a face of most peculiar and lasting attraction—a face that, once seen, could never again be forgotten, but haunted the memory like one of those old pictures which we see, for a moment, in some dark gallery, or the dim aisle of a foreign church, and never lose again.

She lived alone, at some distance from town, in a cottage of her own ; and free, and strange, and untinged with any affectation of propriety, as was her conduct, no breath had ever been raised against her, no man's name was ever mentioned with that of little Fridoline ! She seemed more calculated to awaken extreme interest and admiration, than any warmer feeling ; and there lurked something in the mocking expression of her great, dark eyes, that would, unconsciously, make any man feel himself ridiculous, who attempted to speak to her of love. She went seldom into the society of other

artists ; La Thionville's being almost the only house at which she ever appeared.

For Celeste had seen at once, with her natural quickness in discerning talent, that Fridoline would one day be distinguished ; and this—and, perhaps, some kindlier feeling—had made her hold out her hand to the friendless girl, when she first began her London career, and show her many little attentions which Fridoline's ignorance of English life rendered most acceptable ; once, even attending her in an attack of sudden illness. Now she was amply repaid. To say—"Little Fridoline has promised to come," was sufficient inducement to make everyone else come also ; and any party was sure to go off brilliantly when she could be persuaded to attend.

or Fridoline possessed a fine and subtle wit ; the most cutting powers of sarcasm ; and, at times, but rarely, an unexpected and passionate pathos, which made her conversation unlike all others. And, in her society, grave men of genius were silent, in admiration at the

ever changing fancy and brilliant language of this gifted little being.

She liked Earnscliffe ; perhaps, because he had never attempted to pay her any of the *fades* compliments which she detested ; perhaps, because—although knowing no more of her history than did others—something in his own heart recognized Fridoline's high and extraordinary nature, and made his manner to her, while perfectly respectful, kind and sympathising beyond that of mere acquaintance.

This evening she was in her liveliest vein ; every word that fell from her lips was sparkling ; every idea seemed unusually fresh and original, even from her ; and Celeste, without in the least imitating Fridoline, was scarcely less brilliant ;—even more desirous to shine.

Her green-room stories of the last two months—her excellent repetition of the *bon mots* of others—her delicate mimicry—and her art of hitting off a character in about six words —had never appeared so amusing to Philip before. No wonder that, in such society, he

felt like a person suddenly descending from the frigid Simplon into sunny Italy, after his courtship and icy honeymoon ; and that the hours struck unheeded, which should have recalled him to his bride.

He had, himself, regained all his usual spirits ; and when, at length, the new dancer was discussed, grew animated in his praises of her exceeding beauty.

“ I am slightly acquainted with Miss Elmslie (for, with all her grace, she is an English-woman), ” said Celeste ; “ and shall invite her some evening, next week, to my house. Of course, I need not ask you to meet her ? ” she added maliciously, to Philip.

“ Certainly not, ” he replied ; “ I shall need no invitation.”

Celeste looked very bright—“ And you, mademoiselle, ” she continued to Fridoline, “ will you also meet the young débutante ? ”

Fridoline assented, after a slight hesitation ; and then enquired if anyone knew the particulars of Miss Elmslie’s history before she went on the stage ?

"I do," answered Neville; "she comes from my own county, although not from the same neighbourhood. I think I have heard that her father was a clergyman; he was, at all events, a professional man, and, dying suddenly, left this girl, then about fourteen, quite alone in the world, and without money or protectors. Her extraordinary beauty and grace—I remember once seeing her when she was a child—were exactly of that order best suited to the stage; but into whose hands she fell, and how she came to adopt dancing as a profession, I have never found out—indeed, it is only a few days since I discovered that the 'rising star,' about whom we have all heard so much, was no other than little Rose Elmslie."

Fridoline seemed greatly interested in these few words of the girl's history.

"Yes," she said, turning to Celeste, "I shall be glad to meet her. What evening are we to come?"

Celeste considered. "Well, after 'Fidelio,'

on Tuesday, if you are free. I know she does not perform that night." Fridoline was also disengaged, and Neville and the two or three chosen friends, 'honoured' by a place at Celeste's table, were invited and accepted. Lastly, she turned to Earnscliffe—"And you," she said, "will you really come again so soon?"

Philip had a vague recollection that, on Tuesday, was to be a grand entertainment at some of his wife's relations; but to meet Fridoline, and the lovely Rose Elmslie, and half-a-dozen of his own intimate friends, at Celeste's house, was to him temptation irresistible—and he accepted.

At an hour of the morning not to be mentioned, Neville drove home with Philip to his house in Park Lane, and, noticing his friend's timid knock at his own door, congratulated himself, as he went off, that he was still a bachelor.

The sleepy servant looked rather surprised, as he admitted his newly-married master at such an hour; but Philip was too much occu-

pied with his own reflections to notice the man's face. Taking a light, he proceeded upstairs as noiselessly as he could, hoping Clara was long since asleep, and would not hear him come in.

When he entered the room all was quiet—she lay motionless; the fire had long since burnt out, and the whole room seemed dark and silent. Shading the light with his hand, he approached the bed-side, and glanced at his wife. She was not asleep; but—long and bitterly though she had wept—the marks of tears were now carefully effaced from her cheeks, whose ghastly whiteness formed a striking contrast to his own face, all flushed and animated. “Clara—not asleep?”

“Not asleep, Mr. Earnscliffe; yet, I believe, it is past four o'clock!”

“Clara, I am indeed sorry—I was detained by so many old friends—the club ——”

“Stop, sir!”—and, as she rose a little, her face grew exactly like that of her father's in its expression. “You are, of course, at

liberty to choose your own companions, your own hours ; stay out as late as you like—live as you will—I am indifferent to it all ; but do not, at least, stoop to the meanness of a falsehood. You have *not* been at your club until four o'clock in the morning. No, allow me to continue,"—for she saw the indignant words were ready to burst from Philip's lips. "Another time, you will, perhaps, have the goodness to sleep in your dressing-room, after remaining out half the night. My health is feeble, and will not admit of my being thus disturbed ;" and she turned away from him.

In those few minutes she had completed their estrangement for ever. Philip stood one second irresolute—then turned, and, without a syllable in reply, left the room.

When he came home, he felt that he had acted unkindly towards Clara, in leaving her thus on the first night of their return ; and at the sight of her pale face, kind words of excuse were rising to his lips, but her harsh reception of him had undone all. She had

accused him of meanness—of falsehood, and had herself made the proposal that they should, in future, occupy separate apartments; his pride was galled to the very quick. From that moment he knew that an eternal barrier was raised between them, and a bitterer feeling than, in all his young life, he had yet experienced, arose in his breast. He threw himself down on his dressing-room sofa, and, with a strange calmness, reflected what their future existence would be.

He felt that love—even if its shadow had ever existed between his wife and himself—was entirely over now. Only four weeks ago they had stood together before God's altar, and taken those solemn oaths of love and truth, ‘till death should part them;’ and already both had failed in their contract. Clara had openly acknowledged her indifference to him that night, and he, a dozen times, had bitterly repented his marriage, and already chafed impatiently under the yoke.

“I will live for the world only, then!” he

exclaimed, at length. “She has offered me my life apart, and my freedom, and I accept it. In the society of Celeste and Fridoline, I am not likely to miss that of my frigid wife”—and he laughed, but with a forced, unnatural sound.

With all his faults, Philip had, unfortunately for himself, a deep and affectionate heart, and he felt an aching void when he recalled Clara’s harsh, unforgiving words, and contrasted them with old Miles’s kindly greetings at the breakfast-table, and ready excuses of his late hours.

The lights, the laughter, the gay voices of Celeste’s party were still whirling in his brain; but a look of inexpressible sorrow stole over his young face, as he felt that for him the word ‘home’ had henceforth no meaning.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILIP and his wife did not meet the following morning. Clara afterwards went to spend the day with her mother ; and, in the afternoon, Philip rode down to see his uncle. It was a fine winter day, the air ringing and elastic ; and, as he cantered on at a quick pace, his spirits rose under the influence of exercise, and the pure, healthy atmosphere.

He found Miles at home, occupying himself, as usual, about his grounds. His face grew radiant when he saw Philip in the distance, riding up the long avenue which led to the house. He had not hoped to see him on

the first day after his return, and advanced to greet him with as earnest a welcome as though they had not met for years.

“It was kind of you, Phil, to remember me so soon. I wanted you especially to-day. That idiot of a head-gardener has positively proposed that I should throw down the old wall by the kitchen garden, and extend the shrubbery as far as the stables on the other side, shutting out the distant view of the river. You don’t think it would be an improvement?” He spoke quickly, and Philip knew well that he had branched off into another subject only to conceal his pleasure at seeing him.

“We will talk it all over, uncle,” he replied; “for, if you will have me, I intend remaining to-day, and dining with you.”

“If I will have you, boy? I am only surprised at having you so soon. As a rapturous bridegroom, I never expected you would remember me. However, I must say, that even in your honeymoon you were not

forgetful of me. You write capital letters, Phil."

A servant now came up and took his horse; and Miles, linking his arm in Philip's, walked him off to see the projected improvements, and hear his opinion upon them; and thus engaged, the short winter afternoon passed only too quickly to the old man.

Philip did not approve entirely of the gardener's plan, but proposed another, by which the shrubbery could be extended without interfering with his uncle's favourite view of the river; and he promised to draw the plans, and come down and superintend the work himself, as soon as the weather was favourable for commencing.

"I knew Duncan was wrong," said Miles, "although I could not improve upon his plan myself. I wanted your taste and quick eye, Phil."

"I am afraid I shall lose my old gardening tastes now," replied Philip. "London will henceforth be my home, with the exception of

three months' shooting in the Highlands, or an excursion abroad, every autumn ; and I shall forget all the familiar lore of planting, and planning, and grafting, that I have studied in this old garden, under Duncan, so many years. You cannot tell how pleasant it seems for me to return here, sir ; although I have been only away four weeks, I feel like a wanderer returning home."

"And how often shall I see you, Phil ?" asked Miles, abruptly, when they sat together in their old places, after dinner, just as they had done for more than fifteen years. "I suppose, with all your grand friends, and your parties, and your wife, I shall stand a poor chance."

" You do not really mean that," returned Philip. " As far as engagements go, they cannot be much more numerous now than they were before I married ; and, doubtless, my wife will be able to spare me a few hours occasionally, when I wish to visit you."

Something in his tone, as he said the words,

'my wife,' made his uncle look at him more closely. Then he noted that Philip, without being either paler, or thinner, or in any way altered in feature, looked already much older. In a few weeks, the indescribable expression of youth was gone, and his face had already the look of a man who has lived and suffered. It was a painful thought for Miles; and, changing the subject, he enquired if Philip was writing anything?

"Not at present, uncle. You remember our plan of going into the country, for me to think and breathe before beginning another book—well, I believe my new life will work, although in a different manner, a somewhat similar result. After a few months of matrimony, I shall take up my pen."

"Oh!—where is Clara, to-day?"

"Clara? well, I believe she is at home—no—I recollect, at Lady St. Leger's."

"Indeed! Well, what did you think of my Yorkshire property, Phil?"

"It is a beautiful place. I wonder you

have not been there more frequently yourself. The time of year was unfavourable for seeing it to advantage ; but I was never tired of wandering about with my gun, over the moors, or among those wild hills, and in the deep recesses of the forest, covered although it all was with snow."

" Warm work for a honeymoon !" muttered Miles.

Then they began speaking of other things —old interests in which both were connected—old scenes—old times—Philip's literary projects for the future. They seemed, by tacit consent, to avoid any mention of the present ; and Philip, especially, turned away from all subjects that bore upon his marriage, or the St. Legers."

When eleven o'clock came, his horse was ordered round ; and he was preparing to wrap up for his cold ride, when the old butler came in, and said, it was a fearful bad night for the young master to ride up to town. It had thawed, and then frozen again in the course of the evening, and the ground was like ice ;

while the first flakes of an approaching snow-storm were beginning to fall.

"I don't like taking the horses out at night, when I can help it, Phil, as you know," said Mr. Earnscliffe; "but I will order the carriage round, sooner than that you should run any risk of breaking the mare's knees. Marcus and Anthony are so steady, they would not fall on ice itself. Besides, you are not half warm enough clad to be exposed to such weather."

Philip saw that his uncle never even thought of asking him to stop all night; and he rather hesitated at making the proposal himself, though he knew Clara would not be anxious at his absence, (after the manner of most young wives), and he really preferred remaining where he was, to riding through a snow-storm.

"Well, the fact is, uncle, I should not like to take out your horses; and it is certainly not a night for my skittish Gulnare. If my old bed-room ——"

"Why, of course, boy. I am only too glad to keep you; but I thought your wife would be anxious, and I did not like to propose it."

"Oh, I dare say Clara will guess where I am."

So Philip's old room was prepared for him; and as he was tired after his last night's vigil, he soon bade his uncle good-night, and went off to bed.

"For the thousandth time in my life, I thank heaven that I never married," said old Miles, devoutly, when the door closed after his nephew. "Here is another specimen of wedded bliss, and after only four weeks' experience! When I think of all the talk there was of his honour, and her happiness for life! I repeat it," he added, with increasing fervour, "thank heaven, I never married!"

When Philip returned home, at noon, next day, he found Clara reading in the drawing-room. She laid down her book on his entrance, and greeted her husband with the same polite ceremony she would have shown

to a stranger. Her manner at once prevented Philip from volunteering any explanations of his long absence ; nor was she likely to ask him any question after their recent scene on his return from Celeste's party.

"Are you engaged to-day? I have an invitation for you to accompany me to my father's, to dine."

The St. Legers, according to the usual plan adopted by people who are utterly ruined, were giving a whole series of expensive entertainments.

Philip hated all grand dinners ; and he felt that those of his pompous father-in-law would now be more than ever distasteful to him. He took out his note-book, determined not to go.

"I am sorry I have an engagement for to-day ; it is one of long standing—a dinner given to B—, by some of our members, that it would be impossible for me to miss."

Clara's lip curled.

"The Duke and Duchess of C—, the

Marquis of W——, Prince N——, and a dozen others, will dine with *us*," she said. "It is almost a kindness in Mr. Philip Earnscliffe to give up his place; for the dining-room in Grafton Street is so unfortunately small."

The sarcasm was meant to hide her wounded feelings; but her lips quivered a second when she thought of appearing for the first time, as a bride, without her husband. She knew that a club dinner was really no engagement, and that Philip's answer was but a tacit acceptance of the liberty she had herself offered him.

"How brilliant you will be!" he remarked, sauntering towards the door. "We shall only have L——, and T——, and D——," naming some of the most distinguished literary men in London. "Pray, remember for me a few of the Duke of C——'s best bons-mots, and a little of the caustic wisdom of the noble marquis; and, in the meantime—au revoir."

He smiled gaily as he left her; and she felt that their actual life had begun in earnest.

Clara dined alone at her father's—Philip, at his club. But, as is usual in such cases, he was in high spirits, and enjoyed the evening immensely ; while his wife had a martyrdom to encounter in the half-pitying looks of her dearest friends, and the still more trying after-dinner questions of her own female relations.

A man feels no slur upon his pride in the world's thinking that he is not particularly happy at home ; but to every woman the mere suspicion of being neglected in her marriage, is in itself a humiliation.

“ Well, my dearest Clara,” said one of her cousins, as she sat in her bridal satin, turning over, listlessly, the leaves of some annuals. “ I am glad to see you looking so bright and well. But where is Mr. Earnscliffe ? Surely, he must be here ; and yet I have not happened to see him.”

“ Philip was engaged to a literary dinner,” answered Clara, shortly.

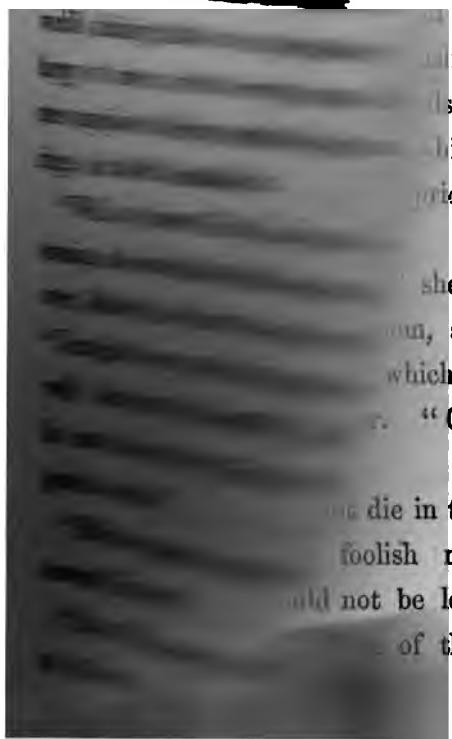
“ Ah, yes ! Well, one cannot expect authors to be like other men—these great geniuses

are so seldom fond of home, or quiet society—and Mr. Earnscliffe is *so* young."

" Your married happiness has at least, then, been spared the trial that is in store for mine, dear," replied Lord St. Leger's daughter, smiling calmly. " If genius is required to make a husband undomestic, Sir Harry is undoubtedly safe." And she glanced at her cousin's husband—a stupid, heavy-looking young man, with elaborate whiskers, and a very small head; but who, nevertheless, had not the reputation of being exclusively fond of his wife's society.

The lady coloured scarlet, and Clara felt her small triumph. She began talking with more animation to the people round her; listened with apparent interest to Prince N——'s bad English, and worse wit, and the inane dullness of the Duke of C——; and gradually her spirits rose with her wish to appear happy. But, when it was all over, and she was driving back to her lonely home, her cousin's words recurred to her in more than their first bitterness.

~~One in a week
of his days
he would
immediately
to cause him
despair.~~



similar remarks must have been very succeeding but her husband, armed and multi-nature revolted once. Lady Clara commencement of herself offered to him of his youth and he had thrown him into his old associates—indeed he had revolted at

she thought, as she went, and looked round which seemed to mock her. "Oh, that either of

die in this world because foolish marriages, or the world not be long in diminishing of the earht—on the

contrary, the fact of their having done so, generally appears to add some years to the natural term of existence.

Philip and his wife lived on just as they would have done had they been any happily assorted couple ; and weeks, and months passed by, while each in its course only deepened their mutual estrangement, and lessened any prospect of their reunion. It had become an established thing for Philip to associate as usual, with all his old bachelor friends, and for Lady Clara to appear without him at the opera, or among her own circles; for, since his marriage, Philip had cared far less for balls and dinner parties, and more for that society, in which it was impossible to meet his wife or her relations.

He had conceived a feeling closely bordering upon hatred, for both the St. Legers.

Of the way Lady St. Leger had beguiled him into his marriage with her daughter, solely for his uncle's wealth, he had no longer any doubt ; and, for that good deed, he felt

exactly the amount of gratitude which was natural towards his mother-in-law ; while in his sentiments for her husband, was mingled a proud contempt, that he was scarcely able to conceal.

Lord St. Leger had, from the first, treated him with a sort of fawning affection, which, coming from such a man, Philip knew could only cover some latent design ; and very shortly after his marriage, its nature had been revealed. St. Leger tried to borrow money of him. Philip affected the first time to treat it as a mere joke, saying, he had not ten pounds of his own in the world; but when, a few days having elapsed, St. Leger again assailed him—Philip, having in the meantime, attained his majority—and endeavoured with a great deal of soft plausibility to induce him to endorse some bills (knowing well that any paper bearing the signature of Miles Earnscliffe's heir, would be readily discounted by those among the fraternity of Hebrew money-lenders, who already looked with suspicion upon his own noble autograph), Philip turned away from him in disgust.

" You are altogether mistaken in me, Lord St. Leger," he replied, haughtily. " I have no property whatever of my own ; and it is, therefore, impossible for me to become security for others. The allowance made me, since my marriage, by my uncle—although a most liberal one—is not more than sufficient for my own use. I shall consider it right to give it up entirely, when I am enabled to live upon the fruits of my own exertions ; and, in the meantime, I must entreat of you not to place me in the painful position of having to refuse you again."

When he was stern, Philip's face could assume an expression not unlike that of Miles ; and in his dark eye and compressed lip, St. Leger read a cold, unalterable determination. He was foiled a second time by the nephew, as he had already been by the uncle ; and, from that day forth, made no more affectionate demonstrations to his son-in-law. They detested each other mutually.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM his wife's relations, and the world in which they moved, Philip turned, with undisguised pleasure, to his artist friends, and the easy, unrestrained intercourse of their life. Especially, between himself and little Fridoline a feeling of friendship had of late arisen, that soon bordered upon intimacy.

The world, in general, scoffs at the possibility of mere friendship between a man of Philip's age, and a young girl—especially, if, like poor Fridoline, she chance to be an actress—and, in the generality of cases, the world would be right. But Fridoline was so

entirely apart from everybody else, in her odd, secluded life, and undisguised avowal of her preference, that even she was allowed to have Earnscliffe for a friend, and no tongue be found to whisper an idle word against her.

He constantly met her at rehearsal, of a morning, and, when the weather was fine and Fridoline walked, would accompany her home. She lived in a cottage on the very extremity of Hampstead Heath—an extremely inconvenient distance from the theatre, but which she had chosen from her love for the country, and because it was away from the noise and smoke of London. She could walk any distance, without fatigue, and seldom took a cab in the daytime, when the weather was at all fine.

One day, after the rehearsal of a new and difficult part, of a more tragic nature than she generally performed, Philip volunteered his escort home, and was, as usual, accepted. She was flushed when they left the theatre ; but, by the time the interminable streets were traversed, and they had gained the open

heath, her cheeks became very pale; while her steps flagged, and she looked wearied. Some felled trees lay by the road-side, and Philip proposed she should sit down and rest awhile. She did so silently, and he took a place by her side.

It was a sweet breezy day early in June, and the country was covered with tender green. A few fleecy clouds flitted slowly over the blue sky—the swallows, newly returned, wheeled round in playful circuits—and the air was sweet with the scent of violets from a neighbouring garden, mixed with the haw-thorn-blossom of the hedges.

“The world is fair,” said Fridoline, in a low voice, and as if addressing herself more than her companion, “but stained and blotted out with sin!”

“Of which *you*, at least, have known little,” added Philip, gently.

“Of which I have known much,” she replied, turning round her wearied face to his. “Much”—she went on, almost vehe-

mently—"more than any other girl of my age ; or, at least, I have felt it more than any other can have done—have had it crushed down, in all its hideousness, upon myself—ay ! upon my own flesh and blood—until the whole earth has seemed to me a black and festering mass of corruption—"

"How old are you, Fridoline ?" interrupted Philip, with a feeling almost of horror at the girl's unnatural manner.

"Nineteen," she replied ; "and to-day is my birth-day."

Philip took her hand, touched at the humble, mournful tone of her voice, and pressed it, as he wished her some kindly birth-day congratulations. She scarcely heeded him, though she tried to smile.

"Nineteen !" she went on, "and to know all that I do ! I cannot believe I am so young. Is it only four years since I woke from my childhood, and knew what I was, and the terrible darkness of my life ? Oh, come away !" She rose hastily ; and, as though suddenly re-

collecting that she was thinking aloud, “ come home—I have need of my home and rest.”

He gave her his arm, for she trembled violently, and they walked on, during the remainder of the way, in silence. Philip felt that, in her excited state, it was useless for him, ignorant as he was of her former history, to attempt any thing like consolation ; and Fridoline, pale and agitated, never opened her lips. She seemed scarcely conscious that she was not alone.

They stopped before a pretty cottage—one of the old country cottages, that, a few years ago, were still to be found on Hampstead Heath—this was Fridoline’s home. Roses and creepers grew almost entirely over the front, and covered the little entrance porch of rustic wood, where, happy in the sun, lay a rough, wiry terrier. He started up with an angry snap at his own sleepiness, when he heard approaching steps ; but bounded forward the moment he saw his mistress. She stooped to pat him ; and the creature looked up into her

face with an expression of such love, as, for the first time, brought tears into her eyes.

“*You* are glad to see me, poor old Karl !” said Fridoline; and she entered the little garden.

Philip had before accompanied her to the gate; but she had never invited him further; so he prepared now to take his leave.

“No; come in !” she cried. “*You* shall be my birth-day guest.”

Her manner was so earnest, that Philip saw she really wished it; and they walked together towards the house.

Karl looked with extreme suspicion at the first male intruder he had ever seen in his mistress’s domains; and, as he followed them up the path, suddenly relieved himself of these feelings by giving an angry bark, and seizing the skirts of Philip’s coat in his teeth—shaking the cloth from side to side with great ferocity. As he did so, he was almost lifted from the ground, and his hind feet scratched angrily in the gravel. Philip naturally turned at the

unexpected assault—so did Fridoline ; and, in a second, by one of those instantaneous transitions peculiar to her temperament, the sense of the ludicrous mastered every other feeling. The expression of old Karl, snarling and scratching, and rolling his sharp eyes with rage, yet, still holding fast—while Philip, with great dignity, attempted in vain to shake him off—was too much for little Fridoline, although her eyes were actually suffused with tears at the moment, and she burst into peals of laughter ; not one, merely—but peal after peal of a clear, ringing, childish laughter, that at length brought the solitary maid-servant to the door, to see what it was all about.

She was a dark, foreign-looking woman of middle age, and harsh features ; and her expression was not pleasant on seeing Philip. However, when she perceived how matters stood, she darted out at once to his relief ; and by dint of pulling and threats, and, at length, a few vigorous blows, Karl was mastered, and carried off, to vent his remaining fury in cap-

tivity. Little Fridoline only laughed the more at this conclusion of the contest, and, when, at length, she was able to speak, and apologize to Philip for Karl's inhospitable mode of welcome, her usual spirits had completely returned, and every trace of emotion disappeared from her sunny face.

"We are so unused to visitors in my *ménage*," she said, "that you must forgive poor Karl. He looks upon all intruders as his natural enemies; and, I see, I must be more careful in introducing you to the other members of the household. For I have two large cats, and a tame hawk, who could all be formidable if they chose."

"You are fond of pets, Fridoline."

"Yes, I am fond of Karl, and he loves me—the others are my amusement. It makes my greatest distraction to collect the animals together, and watch them, when my head aches after learning some long *rôle*. The cats are friends in appearance, but not in reality, except as regards their hatred to Karl—the

principle, perhaps, of many a human alliance —and it does me good to see the hearty spite with which they occasionally give vent to their feelings, and claw each others ears. Karl looks down upon them with sovereign contempt, as if aware of his power ; but in another quarter he is a mere hen-pecked coward. My hawk, old Bess—there she is, making rushes after worms on the grass plot—is his household virago ; and by making unexpected descents on him, from behind dark bushes in the garden, and peering fiercely down and hissing from impossible places, when he thinks he is just going to have a quiet, noon-day nap, makes his life a constant uneasy watch. The canaries are, compared with the others, stupid things ; but even their rage, when the sparrows dare to come near their cage in the garden, and pick up their discarded dainties, is almost human."

And all this little nonsense in Fridoline's foreign English, and told in her own lively way, sounded pretty. She led Philip into her small drawing-room, and the simple, good taste of

its appearance struck him at once, compared to the glittering grandeur with which Celeste, like most actresses, loved to be surrounded. The furniture was all in the cottage style, and the curtains of plain white muslin ; but altogether, it had the air of a room inhabited by some young and innocent girl. A small piano stood open—work, and books that looked well read, lay on the table—and bouquets of fresh flowers were everywhere.

“ Poor Hulda brought me all these flowers for my birth-day,” said Fridoline, “ and told me as she had no taste, I must arrange them for myself. She loves me as her own child, and has been with me all my life.”

It was the first time Fridoline had ever made so distinct an admission of belonging to humanity, and Philip thought he might improve upon the opportunity.

“ Your servant does not look English, from the slight glimpse I had of her,” he remarked.

“ No, Mr. Earnscliffe,” said Fridoline, slyly, “she is not ; neither is Hulda an English name.”

“ Her face is not French.”

“ She is not a Frenchwoman.”

“ Nor German ?”

“ Nor German, nor Danish, nor Swedish.”

He was silent. Fridoline’s eyes laughed, though her lips did not.

“ What do you think of my house?” she asked.

“ It is a charming little place, for the summer. How do you like it in winter, when the snow is on the ground ?”

“ Ah ! that is not the question. You should say, rather, in those long months of mild, drizzling rain, which make up your English winters. Well, I must confess it is not so pleasant then as in June, though I am always too occupied to be dull. When we do have fine, hard frost and bright sun, and the trees and bushes bend under their load of snow, I love it !”—she looked animated—“ I wish it would last for months. It reminds me of our real, long, glorious northern winters — ” Here she stopped short, and looked rather afraid she was going too far.

"Long, glorious winters," said Philip ; "but not those of France or Germany. Fridoline, I shall find out your secret soon."

She rose laughing, and cried—

"I know your thoughts well ; but I shall have no pity upon your curiosity, and, to punish you, you shall remain alone, while I take off my bonnet, and ease Hulda's mind as to your appearance in my house ; for I am afraid, at present, she is rather of Karl's way of thinking on the subject."

When Fridoline had left the room, Philip approached the table, and began to examine the numerous and well-read books, in all languages, that were scattered there. With the exception of a few volumes of poetry—a Dante, Goëthe's Faust, some of Oehlenschläger's smaller poems, and a volume of Shakspeare—all the books were of an abstract and somewhat gloomy nature. No works of lighter literature, no modern fictions, such as the generality of girls of her age would delight in, were there ; but abundance of subtle philo-

sophy upon human nature, and devotional books, of the sternest, most austere description, such as might be fittingly placed in the hands of a criminal stained with the blackest guilt. She seemed to have chosen all that bore on the darker side of our existence, or that analyzed deeply the enigma of the human heart under the influence of sin; as though her own young life could already need the solution which few care to seek for till they have themselves tasted fully of the bitter after-fruits of passion.

One large book seemed particularly well read, and Philip opened it. It was striking contrast to all the others—the illustrated edition, in German, of Grimm's fairy tales. He turned over the pages so loved in his own childhood, saw Hans once more, sitting under the rock with a lump of gold as big as his head; the musicians of Bremen, defending, with their unearthly music, the lonely house against the robbers; the happy elves, trying on their nether garments, made

by the shoemaker's grateful wife; the mayor and burgomaster, jumping into the pond after the reflection of the clouds, which they take for flocks of sheep: and, at last, Philip grew so interested, that he seated himself, and began the perusal of some of his old friends with much zest.

In the meantime, Fridoline had changed the dark morning-dress, in which she always went to rehearsal, for a little white muslin frock, and re-arranged her luxuriant golden hair. Then she ran off to Hulda, in the kitchen, and explained to her that Mr. Earnscliffe was to be looked upon with no mistrust, being a poet, and unlike other men, and a very kind friend of her own; during all of which, Hulda continued her cooking with great sternness of expression, and did not look the least convinced in her own mind. Then Fridoline added—

“And he will stay to dine with me, dear Hulda; so I shall have a guest on my birthday, and you must give us one of your best dinners.”

After this she went out with Karl, whose temper was somewhat restored, into the garden, to look after a very early moss-rose she had been watching for some days past. The bud had just half broken into blossom, and Fridoline plucked it and ran up to the glass-door, which led from the garden into her sitting-room.

She saw Philip reading, and, entering noiselessly, stole up and leant over his shoulder, before he was aware of her presence.

"Oh, wise philosopher!" she cried, suddenly. "With a table full of deep and subtle works, I find you poring over Hans and Gretchen."

"Well," returned Philip, "the wonder is—not that I should read them, but that a person like Fridoline should permit such childish stories to repose among her sage books."

Her face grew grave directly.

"It is strange that I should like anything belonging to the innocence of children," she answered; "but, though I cannot care for

novels, it delights me to read those wild German stories that I have known all my life. They have the same effect upon me as my animals. They take me altogether from the world, and the people I belong to; while novels are still mimic representations of our existence, only seen through falsely-coloured glasses. No! if I read of human beings and human hearts, let me study them as they are in their stern, unaltered reality; and, then, when I want amusement, turn to the honest love of Karl, and the innocent vices of the cats, or the dwarfs and fairies of old Grimm."

"What an early rose-bud, Fridoline!"

"It is for you." She placed it in his button-hole. "For two birth-days I have had no companion but Hulda, and I am so glad to see you here to-day, and to offer even a poor flower to some one who will accept it on my birth-day."

"And I have nothing to offer you, Fridoline," replied Philip. "You should receive—not give—presents on your birth-day."

" You can give me something I should like," she returned. " Write me a few lines—not like those you write to Celeste—full of compliments and sentiments you don't feel—but the simple expression of some feeling connected with this sweet June day—something that I can keep to remind me of my nineteenth birth-day, in England, when I have returned to my own country."

" It is difficult to write lines addressed 'to Fridoline, on her nineteenth birth-day,' without being complimentary," Philip answered, looking up into her earnest face, as she leaned over him; " however, I will try. But you must promise not to look at me, as I write, or 'those deep, dark eyes' will be sure to be introduced, much to your indignation."

The slightest flush rose in Fridoline's cheek, as she stepped back from his side; and, seating herself by her work-table, she took up some half-finished embroidery that lay there. But, as Philip began to write, the work fell from her fingers; and she watched

him intently until he finished—watched his mobile features, that lit up with every rapidly-succeeding image of his own fancy—his high, fair brow—his careless, poet-like attitude—and thought—what did poor little Fridoline think?

“It is done, Fridoline; but, I am afraid, you will not like the lines. They are very common-place, after all. Shall I read them?”

“No; I would rather read them for myself.”

She took the paper, and, turning towards the window, read the contents eagerly.

Could Philip have seen her face, he would have discovered a slight shade of disappointment, when she finished; however, she turned quickly towards him again, and said, with a smile, ‘the lines were beautifully written, and that she should value them much;’ placing them, as she spoke, in a writing-case, on the table.

“And the sentiment,” said Earnscliffe—“does that not please you?”

"Yes—only you alluded to my theatrical success—you could not, even for to-day, forget that I am an actress. Come out, now," she added, "and see the extent of my wide domain. It is too fine to remain within doors."

They went out together in the garden, and sat down under a pink hawthorn in full flower on the little grass-plot.

Fridoline's borders were redolent of early sweets, for Hulda was a good gardener, and with directions from her mistress, kept every thing in perfect order. She was a remarkably plain woman, and had always had an extreme dislike for the stronger sex, even in her own land ; and this feeling, when extended to Englishmen, amounted to open enmity, that afforded Fridoline much amusement. So no man was ever admitted upon the premises, except for those needful operations of cutting and pruning, which were beyond Hulda's powers ; and, in the early summer mornings, she even rose and mowed the lawn, to the great risk of cutting off her own feet, and the

unbounded pleasure of all the small boys who gathered round the gate, however early she began, and, thrusting their snubby-noses through the bars, made remarks detrimental to the ‘blessed old furriner’s’ science.

There was a hay-field close to the garden ; the scent of the new-cut hay mingled pleasantly with that of the flowers, and Philip and Fridoline sat talking in the fresh air until three o’clock, when Hulda appeared and waved her hand at the porch ; this, Fridoline understood to be a signal for dinner, and they entered.

Philip did ample justice to the simple meal ; and never enjoyed a grand dinner-party half as much as his *tête-à-tête* with Fridoline, who chatted and laughed merrily, but did the small honours as gracefully as though she were a countess. When dinner was nearly over she said—“I am sure Hulda must have taken a fancy to you, for she has given us two of our national dishes, and nothing is a stronger mark of favour.”

“I should think the attention was more

probably paid to your birth-day than to your visitor," returned Philip. "The few glances I have caught her giving me have certainly not been loving ones. It is a pity she understands so little English, as I have no opportunity of paying her any compliments on her excellent dinner."

Fridoline conveyed this speech to Hulda in a whisper, whereupon, without any reply, she walked stiffly out of the room, shutting the door very loudly in her retreat.

"She is quite delighted," said her mistress, "but that is her peculiar mode of showing it. I know her so well, poor creature! Is it not strange how anyone can live in a country for months and months, as she has done, without learning to speak? I could make myself understood when I had been in England six weeks."

"But everyone has not the talent of little Fridoline—"

"Fi donc! Monsieur Earnscliffe. You must be thinking of Celeste, or Miss Elmslie, to-

day, or you would not pay compliments. You forget that you are talking to me."

"Indeed, I do not, mademoiselle."

A stranger might have thought this long day, spent in each others society, rather a dangerous one for them both; but Philip, much as he admired and was interested in Fridoline, could never entertain any but a friendly feeling towards this wild, uncertain little being, so unlike all other women; and every thought of hers was too strained upon one deeply-engrossing object, for her to run any risk from human love. At least, Fridoline believed so.

"I have still another room to show you," she said, after dinner. "This one has a western aspect, and when the summer is over, it is cold and dark in the morning; so I have fitted up one upstairs for my winter study, where the early light shines fuller, and I have a pleasant view over the common."

She led the way up the old-fashioned staircase—warning Philip to beware of the project-

ing beams over head—and showed him into her winter study. It was almost a prettier room than the lower one—more light and cheerful ; and though very plainly furnished, made artist-like, by some plaster casts from the antique, and, one or two excellent engravings on the walls.

Philip asked, as he examined them, if she was fond of pictures.?

“I love them beyond everything,” she replied. “Painting is the noblest branch of art after all, and must be by far the sweetest to follow. Authors must toil with pen and paper, and bring out their glowing thoughts through the cold medium of words—which, you know, are not understood by everybody ; untaught people and little children, for instance, the two classes I should like best to please, only see that books are printed paper. But the painter’s words are like those of God : the sky and flowers, and trees—and he speaks to all. How could the touching truths of religion ever have been realized to the common people before

printing was invented, but for painting? The abstract idea of Christ as a teacher, delivering lessons of wisdom and morality, could never have been brought home to them; but they saw Him ministering to the poor--healing the sick--giving life to the dead; saw Him suffering--crowned with thorns--dying on the cross--and they loved and believed."

She spoke in her usual rapid manner; but her eye dilated, and Philip saw that it was a favourite subject.

"Poets and painters each have the same high mission," he answered. "To embody those true and beautiful thoughts that lie in the hearts of most men; but which they require another, peculiarly gifted, to express for them."

"Yes—but poets have more the power of making you feel with their feelings, and see with their senses, than painters, and that is why I prefer painting. A sunset of Claude's, a Madonna of Raphael's, is only a faithful representation of the highest earthly beauty,

from which each mind may derive its own unassisted delight, as it would do from nature herself."

"I am convinced," said Philip, "that painters themselves are the happiest of men. Writers of all kinds, or, at least, the large majority of them, soon grow hardened by rough contact with the world—harsh criticism, and literary jealousies. But an artist has little of such discipline ; he dwells abroad with Nature, or in his studio with Art, hanging over his darling picture with the love of a mother over her first-born—with far tenderer feelings than an author ever felt for the blurred, unsightly manuscript he is committing to the printer. His work is so exclusively the painter's *own* ; he has watched it from the first moment of its conception, through all the dawning shades of development, until its perfection ; and he feels that that individual picture will exist, and speak of him, long after the hand that painted it is cold. And however poor the work, this golden delusion is the

same. No disappointment—no poverty—ever mars the love of the worst painter for his pictures. But your own art, Fridoline," he added, gently, "let us speak of that also."

"Mine!" she answered, mournfully, "oh! you know well that the greatest singers have only their one 'crowded hour of glorious life,' and are then forgotten; while all other genius leaves some permanent creation for the future. An artist, who can live only through his physical powers, has no future existence—our memory dies quicker than the flowers flung at our feet on a farewell-night. Mine is the lowest art of all. I doubt if the first actor who ever lived, really ennobled human nature, or raised one fallen spirit through his genius. Everything about the stage is so false; the light and the paint, and the actors themselves, who are scarcely off the scene before they sink down again from the noblest character into their own debased lives. Why, the very air of the theatre has something unnatural in it—an association of mid-day darkness and

tinsel splendour at night, that I can never shake off. Do you know, Mr. Earnscliffe," she went on, wandering from the original subject, "I never seem to breathe after rehearsal or performance, till I feel myself again in the fresh air of the country."

"You have chosen a pleasant spot," said Philip, as he seated himself at the open window—"one well suited to your simple, natural tastes."

She took a low stool and placed herself near him. "Are *you* perfectly happy?" she enquired, at length, after a pause, and lifting her eyes earnestly to his face.

"Is anyone so?" he replied, while a slight shade crossed his features. "I am certainly not less happy than the generality of men. I have plenty of interest in life; I enjoy society—have ambition to fulfil—bright prospects for the future."

Fridoline shook her head. She had heard rumours of Philip's hasty, ill-assorted mar-

riage, and his reply told her that his pleasures were not in his home.

"I see," she remarked, and asked no more questions.

They went on quietly conversing upon subjects unconnected with themselves, and, at last, among other names, that of Celeste was mentioned.

"Poor Celeste!" said Fridoline.

"Why do you pity her?" returned Philip.

"She seems so perfectly contented—so really happy in her life. You smile at my reason, but you do not know Celeste as I do. When I was utterly friendless in London, I was taken ill, a few days after my first appearance, with an inflammation on the chest—the effect, I suppose, of excitement and exposure to night air—Celeste heard I was alone, and visited and nursed me, and gave up her gay parties to make my sick-room cheerful. Then I found out what a good heart and kindly feeling lie beneath all her little false affectations; and I am sorry now to think that

Celeste should, after all, be so perfectly contented with the life of an actress."

"Celeste is very entertaining," said Philip.
"How charming she was the night we first met Miss Elmslie, at her house!"

"Oh, how do you like Rose Elmslie?" cried Fridoline, suddenly—scanning Philip's face as she spoke. She thought she detected a slight change of colour there.

"There can be but one opinion," he replied,
"she is surpassingly lovely."

"Of course—do you like her?"

"Really, Fridoline, I cannot say that I dislike Miss Elmslie. Poor thing! one must regret that, young and beautiful as she is, she has chosen a life so full of temptations as hers."

"Temptations!" echoed Fridoline, scornfully. "Yes, you are right. Our life *has* temptations to such as Rose Elmslie, though to me they are horrors. Well, as you will not be candid, I will. I was interested in that girl's story, and wished to know her; but the moment we met I felt an 'éloignement'—I

don't know your word in English—towards her, that I have never lost. Her beauty is extraordinary ; but when I look at her fixedly, she grows hideous to me. Either what she is, or what she will be, makes me shrink away from her."

Philip thought Fridoline harsh, and could not at all agree with her opinions of the poor little dancer, and gradually their conversation turned again to other things.

Fridoline talked of her childhood (an unusual confidence for her), in a quiet old country house, where they had seven months of bright intense winter, and five of summer and flowers ; and where, until she was fifteen, she had never known more of the world than going on Sunday to the village church, three miles distant; or more gaiety than the midsummer's night festival among the peasants in the mountains.

Then she made Philip tell of his own childish days ; and her eyes glistened when she heard him regret that he could only just remember his mother.

" You are happy," she murmured, " very happy, in that remembrance of her. Would God I had the same!"

" Have you no mother, Fridoline?" He was sorry for the question, when he saw the spasm of agony which suddenly contracted her features.

" None," she replied, with a hoarse voice and bloodless lip. " Let us speak of other things; I know not why I spoke of home, or of my childhood."

And, with a wonderful effort over herself, she began speaking upon some indifferent subject; and, in a few minutes, had regained her usual lively strain.

The hours passed by unheeded; for no one ever remembered time in the society of Fridoline. All that in usual conversation is tame and common vanished away in the light thrown over the most trivial subjects by her brilliant fancy—her wit—her quick insight—and the natural eloquence, which, even in a foreign language, could find words always ex-

pressive—always ready. And Philip, who detested what are generally styled clever women, forgot that he was listening to one in little Fridoline.

At length, the western sun threw long, slanting shadows across the heath, and he began to think that he ought not to trespass longer on her time, of which every moment was so valuable. He was just preparing to say so, when a sudden noise arose in the household, and Fridoline sprang to her feet.

“Excuse me a minute!” she exclaimed, “Hulda is distributing some of her hourly injustice among my creatures, and I must interfere. She sits at work in the kitchen, and hears a low, ominous sound under the table, without deigning to notice it. The sound deepens—then comes Bess’s well-known hiss—then screams from the cats—and when the hawk is flapping his wings with passion—the cats locked in a perfect embrace of hatred—and Karl flying round and round, gnashing his teeth at everybody—Hulda rises, and, with

the nearest weapon that comes to hand, chastises them all round, and then turns them into the garden. But I never permit it when I am at home; for it is impossible they are all wrong; and they know when they are punished unjustly."

She ran lightly down stairs; and Philip soon heard her in high discussion with Hulda, in some foreign language, which, spoken by Fridoline, sounded musical. Then the voices became fainter, as they went off into the back-garden—probably, after the banished creatures—and, finally, Fridoline remained away so long, that Philip thought he would himself go in search of her.

There were two doors, both on the same side of the room, one leading into the passage, the other to Fridoline's sleeping room—and not having noticed at which he entered, Philip accidentally opened the wrong one. He instantly drew back; but the momentary glance he caught, was of something so white and fresh, that he held the handle of the lock

irresolute, and, finally, took a fuller view of the little room.

It was plain as her sitting room, and as unlike the apartment of an actress. There were no untidy remains of finery—no cheval glass—no filigree bottles—no signs of theatrical costume. On the dressing table a cup with violets in it was the only ornament: on the other side of the glass lay a large clasped book. A white French bed stood in one corner of the room, and, immediately opposite, so that it was the first and last object upon which the eyes of the young actress must daily rest, hung an exquisite copy of one of Guido's pictures: the head of a dying Christ.

Philip felt strangely moved; and impelled by a feeling that he could not withstand, he walked softly to the dressing table and unclasped the book, which bore marks of being better read than any of those down stairs. It was a New Testament—and on the title page was written, in French—‘Fridoline—on her tenth birthday.’ A slight knowledge of northern lan-

guages enabled Philip to discover that the Testament was written in Swedish, and printed at Christiania—so Norway, after all, was Fridoline's country. A black book-marker worked at one end with a cross, was in the book, and Philip turned to the page where it was placed. It was the story of that repentant Magdalene from whom He, in His perfect purity, did not turn away, and the leaf was actually worn and blistered with tears—as though daily read and wept over.

Philip closed the book, and quickly retreated from the poor girl's room, with a feeling of compunction at having thus unwittingly discovered one of the secrets of her life—then he descended to join her in the garden. But in those few minutes his interest in her was increased tenfold, for he knew that, whatever had been her history—whatever her knowledge of vice, whose recollection still seemed to weigh so heavily upon her—Fridoline was now a pure and sinless being.

When the sun had set, and the moon was

just rising over the trees, Philip bade her good-night at the little garden gate.

“May your next birthday prove as happy to you, dear Fridoline, as this one has been to me,” were his last words when they parted.

She stood long, watching his figure till it was lost in the deepening shadows of the heath. Then she prepared to enter; but the cottage looked very dark.

“To work,” she said, and an almost stern expression came over her features. “To work; I have nothing to do with such feelings. My life has henceforth only one object —to work, and toil, and win money.”

And all the youthful beauty was gone from her face, as she entered, and passed quickly into her study.

Long after midnight, the light still shone from Fridoline’s window, while she walked up and down the room, with her eyes heavy, and her whole frame wearied, but still patiently learning her long *rôle* for the morrow.

CHAPTER X.

THE London season drew to a close. That sweet time of early summer, when nature is in her youngest beauty, and every hedge and field laden with freshness ; but which English people choose to spend in town.

Philip was going on in his usual life ; he was, however, thinking earnestly of beginning another work, and was undecided how and where to spend the summer. He longed for quiet—to be away from the St. Legers, and even from his own friends for a time ; but still he hesitated what plan to adopt. He always treated his wife with courtesy, and

would himself make no proposal of actual separation, although their life together had virtually long been one; and the most deadly of all, a separation under one roof.

A circumstance, however, occurred at this time, which rendered him and Clara both more independent.

Although the earl was himself irretrievably ruined, in a younger branch of the St. Leger family there was no lack of wealth. It had entered it by the marriage of one of their house, some years before, with the daughter of a retired manufacturer, and was now enjoyed by a cousin of Lord St. Leger's—a widower, with an only son of about fourteen. It was in the power of the possessor to will the property to whom he chose; and this circumstance, as well as the two young, strong lives which stood between him and the succession, had prevented Lord St. Leger from ever speculating on any contingency that could affect himself.

He was not on good terms even with his

cousin ; and the latter had a whole host of his wife's relations, ready to become his heirs in the event of the death of his own son.

One morning, however—a few days before the time when Lord St. Leger had fixed, in his own mind, that exposure could no longer be avoided, nor angry creditors kept at bay—he found, on his breakfast-table, an ominous-looking letter, with immense black edges, and directed in a lawyer-like hand. As his eye glanced at the post-mark, a strange, nervous tremor came over him, and he could scarcely break open the envelope. Like all gamblers, he was superstitious ; and an unusual run of luck at hazard the last few days gave him a foreboding that his good star was in the ascendant. He was not mistaken. The letter was from his cousin's solicitor, informing him of the melancholy death of his two relations, who had been drowned together by the upsetting of a boat on one of the Highland lakes ; and it went on to state that his cousin having made no provision for an event like the fearful

one which had just occurred, Lord St. Leger, as heir-at-law, inherited the whole of the property.

The father in his will had left everything to his son, with the proviso that should the latter inherit, and die before attaining his majority, the money should be then divided between several of his late wife's relations, who were named. The catastrophe, however, which ended both lives, had been watched by a knot of spectators from the beach ; and there was ample testimony to prove that the boy disappeared, never to rise again, on the first upsetting of the boat ; while his father, who could swim, was seen for several minutes vainly battling with the waves, which, at length, overcame him.

The son, therefore, had never inherited ; and through this slender point of law, Lord St. Leger found himself, at the very moment when his reputation was about to be blasted to the world, suddenly possessed of a large, unincumbered property.

Earnscliffe, without any latent thought for himself, was undisguisedly glad at this sudden turn of events. He had long known that ruin and disgrace were hanging over his father-in-law, and this had made him considerate to Clara, far beyond what her open and almost insulting coldness towards himself deserved. But with this new accession of wealth in her family, everything was changed, and with no feeling of self-reproach he might now see his haughty wife return to the protection of her parents. Clara's pride, however, still revolted against any open separation ; and, miserable as was her married life, she could not determine upon so grave a step as herself proposing to leave her husband's house.

Soon after their cousin's death, the St. Legers determined upon going abroad to spend the remainder of the summer and autumn ; and her mother invited Clara to accompany them to some of the German Baths (for Lord St. Leger's first use of his wealth was, of

course, to renew his acquaintance with Homburg and Baden Baden). With so plausible an excuse, for her health was really delicate, and being under the protection of her own parents, she felt that the world, or even her friends, could say nothing about this temporary separation ; and she really longed for any relief from her present life. Accordingly, she mentioned the proposal to Philip ; and read in his brightening face, his ready acquiescence.

“ I trust you will derive benefit from the change, Clara,” he replied. “ My own autumn will be passed in some quiet spot, where I can enter undisturbed upon my new work. In the winter we shall meet again.”

They parted coldly ; but as friends. And when Philip heard the last sounds of the carriage-wheels, which bore away his wife and her parents, he gave a sigh of intense relief, and felt—“ I am free.”

In the afternoon, he went to call on his friend, Neville. He found the young artist in unbounded spirits. His large picture in the

exhibition was sold ; and he had, that very day, received orders for two more of similar size.

“ Congratulate me ! I am now on the high-road to fame, Earnscliffe !” he exclaimed, as he shook Philip’s hand, heartily. “ In another year I shall have realized enough money to enable me to go to Rome—two years I shall remain and study there—then return to England ; and, I firmly believe, be one of our first landscape painters.”

Philip warmly entered into his sanguine hopes, and sat long with his friend—who, with his accustomed energy, was already sketching the outline for one of his new pictures.

“ Yours is a happy life, Neville.”

“ Yes—some of my lonely hours, when I have been working at my pictures—and my recent ones of success—I would exchange with no man. But I have had years of toil—bitter toil and disappointment—before attaining to even my present fame. There is so much mere mechanism for a painter to acquire before he can express his ideas. Look at your-

self now—you are five or six years younger than I am ; but your first book—written as you have told me, without an exertion—made you celebrated.”

The remark reminded Earnscliffe of Fridoline, and he repeated some of her observations on Art to Neville.

“ She is a gifted little creature,” he replied, “ but beware of these long, lonely conversations, Phil. A woman like Fridoline would be the very devil to have in love with one.”

“ There is no risk,” said Philip, gravely ; “ Fridoline is not a girl to inspire any light sentiment—nor likely herself to fall in love with a married man.”

“ Ah, true ! I beg both your pardons. The fact is, I never remember that you *are* married. How is your domestic bliss getting on ?”

Philip mentioned the departure of his wife.

“ And what are you going to do with your summer and your freedom ? ” asked the artist : “ not waste them by staying at country houses, I hope.”

Philip said he wished to live in perfect solitude for some months while he worked at his new book.

"Then I have it all," exclaimed Neville, throwing down his pencil, and seizing both Philip's hands. "We will go together, old fellow. I will take you to my wild quarters among the Highlands, where I spent last autumn—and if you do not find them retired enough, you must indeed be fond of solitude. You can write—I sketch—and both forget, in the mountain air, and with nothing but nature round us, our feverish town life, our friends—wives—aye, and Fridoline herself!"

"I am ready," returned Philip.

And they entered so eagerly into their new plans, that Neville soon abandoned his pencil ; and, after changing his painting-blouse for a coat, proposed that they should walk out together in the Park.

It was a hot, bright day ; and all London seemed there. Carriages and equestrians

crowded past, in an unbroken stream ; and Earnscliffe's hat was off repeatedly.

"Hold it in your hand, at once," said Neville. "How can you be at the trouble of uncovering every second, for all these people?"

"It is one of the evils of society, I admit," said Philip ; "but, still, unavoidable. Let us turn into one of the side-walks, where we shall be less disturbed."

At that moment, a very dashing little equipage with two showy black ponies came along, clearing its way dexterously among the interminable labyrinth of wheels, by which it was surrounded. It was driven by a lady, whose perfect *sang froid*, and dress, and remarkable beauty, drew every eye upon her. She was unaccompanied—a diminutive page only sitting behind—but did not seem the least disconcerted at the admiration she attracted.

"Rose Elmslie, by Jove !" said Neville. "Well, she is getting on. Who paid for all that, I wonder, Phil? Count B——, I suppose, out of his Derby winnings,"

Philip's eye marked her coldly ; and he bit his lip, without answering. When she was quite close she perceived them, and coloured scarlet, as she bowed.

Philip took his hat off to the ground. Neville nodded.

" Well, hang it, Phil ! salute your own friends if you will ; but I cannot understand taking off your hat to a woman of that kind, as though she were a duchess."

" I am only just beginning to think that she *is* a woman of that kind," said Philip, in a low voice.

" Why, what should she be ?—poor, lovely, and a dancer—bah !"

Earnscliffe took his friend's arm ; and they walked on to a retired part of Kensington Gardens, where they sat down to discuss their plans for the summer quietly. The artist continued in excellent spirits ; but Philip seemed somewhat depressed, and even more anxious to get away from town than his friend.

" Are you 'thinking of an absent spouse ?'

remarked Neville, at last. " You seem to be very much out of spirits all at once!"

" Not I. I am in remarkably good spirits, on the contrary."

" If it were possible—but no; the sight of that worthless young thing cannot have had any effect upon you."

" If you mean Miss Elmslie by your polite term, undoubtedly not. Miss Elmslie is nothing to me."

" And will continue so, I trust. She is of a worse description than Fridoline, or even Celeste. Tell me what your next book is to be about? Do you sketch the entire outline before commencing, as one does for a picture, or write on where your fancy leads you?"

" Oh! I shall write very differently this time. My two first books have succeeded as much from accident as merit—as much from their vices as their virtues. Now I must begin writing for real fame—for solid criticism."

And the afternoon passed by while they talked over their mutual hopes and projects.

They dined afterwards at Philip's club, and in a few days were *en route* for Scotland.

The remainder of the fine weather passed happily to them both. Each pursued his own occupation, absorbed and uninterrupted; but they had the companionship of kindred thought when they needed it, after work, and would wander for hours together among the mountains in the calm summer evenings.

On Philip the change was most beneficial. He had a softer and more pliant nature than his friend, and his mind had lost more of its tone, during its contact with the world, from the ready way he fell into the life of those around him. But this difference was merely one of temperament. He had more real genius than the artist; and after a few weeks, spent among this grand, still nature, Philip wrote with a fervour and inspiration far surpassing that in either of his former works.

Neville studied fore-grounds—noted atmospheric effects—and thought, as his sketches multiplied, of the pictures they would form,

and of his own fame. He had exactly the organization for a man who is to succeed in this world. Sufficient genius, untiring industry, energy that no failure could damp, an iron frame, and a boundless ambition.

With Philip—to gaze at a golden sunset or mountain storm, was to unloose a flood of unconscious poetry in his heart; and afterwards he simply wrote down his thoughts as they existed, without labour, often without a single alteration, and always forgetful of himself or his own success. With him, the artist was lost in the art, and both, at times, in the source from whence come poet and inspiration alike. With Neville, this was never the case. Possessing an exuberant fancy, he was not, for one moment himself, under the influence of his own imagination. He could conceive wild and beautiful pictures, and for his art had a really passionate love, but it all seemed unconnected, as it were, with his own personal existence; and the artist ever remained a consistent, practical citizen of the world.

He was the best friend and adviser possible for Philip ; who, although he had conformed much more than Neville to the life of society, plunged into numberless follies, from which the other had continued free—was yet a very child at heart, compared to the artist, and still possessed a hundred illusions which Neville had lost in his boyhood. For instance—bitter as had been his own short experience of married life—Philip had still a firm belief in the existence of pure and faithful love; a point on which his friend, if not sceptical, was cold and sarcastic, and, in his new works, wrote with enthusiasm on this subject, in spite of Neville's criticisms. And often, when they walked silently under the starry summer night he felt the mysterious workings of youth and love that were so strong within his own heart, and asked himself if they were never in this world to be satisfied—while he wrote of love and imagined it for others, was his own life to be spent only between the world, and the cold, dull tedium of his loveless marriage ? But

this was a theme he never entered upon with Neville.

The autumn passed quickly away. The hills, from bright golden, had become brown, and the purple was gone from the heather; but at the beginning of November the friends still lingered in their Highland cottage, endeared to them both from the glowing thoughts of pen and pencil, which had there had birth, and neither of them was anxious to return to town.

The days were, however, now very short, and the weather so uncertain, that they, at length, unwillingly departed. Neville to his London lodging, and Philip to pay his uncle a long-promised visit. The St. Legers had not yet returned to England.

During the autumn, Philip had received occasional notes from his wife. They were, like herself, cold, abrupt, and uninteresting, and he did not read them twice; but in the one which awaited him on his arrival at Miles Earnscliffe's, the first lines arrested his atten-

tion at once. Lady Clara announced that they would all be in London during the course of the month, and reminded Philip, at the expiration of the present term, to take on their house in Park Lane for the coming season.

So his wife had still no wish for an open separation !

CHAPTER XI.

AGAIN the London season was at its height.

Philip and Lady Clara had met with a tolerable show of friendliness, on her return from Germany, but he had soon merged again into his old life ; and Clara, whose health appeared little improved, became more gloomy and taciturn than ever.

Her father's unlooked-for accession of wealth, had only added to the bitterness which rankled in her heart about her marriage. She felt that, as the heiress of an immense fortune, she might have been spared the humiliation of stooping to win her young cousin, for the sake of his merchant-uncle's money ; and her mother came in for the full share of thanks, which she

merited, as principal promoter of the marriage ; and had to bear many a cold taunt from her daughter, on the subject.

In time, Clara went rarely even to her own parents' house—more rarely still into society. She shrank, with a morbid feeling, from the scrutiny of her old friends ; and her life was passed in hugging to her heart her disappointment and loneliness. She had no child to break the tedium of her long hours, and open the one warm spring of happiness, left to many a neglected wife—few mental resources—no religion, beyond that of appearing in her pew every Sunday, to listen to some fashionable preacher ; while, week after week, she became more fully sensible of her husband's indifference, and the life of eternal dissipation he was leading.

His new work was in the press, and great things were expected of it. Philip himself felt that it was far superior to either of his former ones ; and his own opinion was confirmed by the friendly criticisms he had re-

ceived on the manuscript. He had much to do in correcting proofs, and so on ; but still found ample time for society, especially that of the *coulisses*, which now appeared to possess a renewed and powerful fascination to the young author.

Neville, meantime, was working, during every moment of daylight, on his pictures. He gave up parties of all kinds, and scarcely even went to the theatre, that his head might be more clear—his hand more steady—for his morning's work ; and, every afternoon after dusk, he took long walks into the country, for the sake of his mental and bodily health. Everything he did was subservient to one object—he must complete his two pictures before the exhibition—be paid for them—and start for Rome ; and not every pleasure in London could have drawn him aside from the steady execution of his plans.

He had not seen very much of Philip since their return from Scotland. He had, himself, no time for visiting ; and every moment of

Earnscliffe's life was so taken up with some new excitement, that his visits to his friend's quiet studio were far less frequent than formerly. Besides this, Neville, on the plea of his seniority, always gave Philip quiet lectures about the way he was frittering away his time, which the latter did not at all relish—especially as he, himself, well knew the truth of these remarks.

One evening, Neville was returning from a long, quick walk on Hampstead Heath—his step firm, his head erect, and his arms folded, as was his wont—when he saw a figure some fifty yards ahead. He thought he recognized the slight form, the slow, graceful walk, and quickened his pace. It was Earnscliffe.

“Good evening, Phil.”

“Hallo! Neville—what, you here?”

“Aye—‘que diable faites vous dans cette galère?’ I suppose you mean to say. Well, I have been doing as you should—walking alone on the heath to cool my head, after the day's work. And you?”

“I?—I have just been walking home with Fridoline,” answered Philip, hesitating a little.

He did not much like talking about her to Neville.

“Oh! how is she getting on, by the way? I have no time for theatres and actresses, and such things now.”

“Fridoline is, as usual, working hard at her profession—looking paler and older, I think—and more strange and lonely in her life than she ever was.”

“Only diversifying it by twilight walks on the heath with Philip Earncliffe,” added the artist. “Poor philosophic little Fridoline! Well, I don’t think you are in any danger from that quarter, whatever she may be—”

“In danger from her!—none I should trust,” returned Philip, with a short laugh, and seemingly quite disposed to change the subject.

“I hope not, I am sure. But independently of Fridoline—who is about the best of them—you are wasting your fine energies

among all these people, when you should be thinking of your art alone. That worthless young Elmslie now—”

“Neville—”

“Don’t be in a rage, Philip, or I shall really think badly of you—”

“I am not the least in a rage; but I will not hear you speak in those terms of poor Rose. She was brought up to a life she now hates, when a mere child; she is lovely, young, surrounded with temptation, and therefore you condemn her—”

“Not in the least. I think her conduct is excessively natural, and like that of every other dancer in the world. I made use of the word ‘worthless’ only because—for her age—she possesses a really unusual amount of deceit, in addition to her beauty, and temptation, and sorrow for the life she leads. Well! it is wonderful how these women all pitch upon you for the repository of their pious compunctions, and how you believe them. First Fridoline—now young Elmslie—I suppose we

shall have Celeste herself next upon your list of penitents. What an absurd world we live in!"

Although Philip defended Rose Elmslie so warmly, it pained him to hear his poor little friend Fridoline classed with her. He felt that the distance between them was immeasurable; but feared provoking Neville's sarcasm by saying so.

"How is Rose deceitful?" he asked, after a pause.

"Only in talking sentiment, and regretting her life with you in the morning, and receiving bracelets from Count B_____, in the afternoon, while she really laughs at you both with somebody else afterwards. But think as you like, you know, I shall certainly retain my opinions too."

Earnscliffe got rather angry, and again began defending Miss Elmslie with all the vehemence of a champion who really doubts the right of his cause; but Neville interrupted him.

"Let us change the subject, Phil ; you are a perfect boy, still, and cannot learn experience as quickly as I did ; however, you will buy it at last—and, in the meantime, do not quarrel with one friend for all the actresses in creation. Towards the end of May, I think I shall start for Switzerland, and shall then remain two years in Italy ; so I shall not see much more of you. But write sometimes, and tell me how all this life of yours ends, and which was right, you or I."

Philip's annoyance was quickly over, and Neville was soon talking eagerly of the progress of his pictures. Then he inquired how soon the new book would appear.

"In about a month," returned Philip. "It is far better written than either of my former ones, consequently, I ought to have good hopes of success ; and yet—I know not why—I have a sort of foreboding that it will be, not, perhaps, a failure, but, at all events, very differently received to the two first."

Neville tried to reason him out of this

feeling, and they parted, with their accustomed friendly shake of the hand, at the Regent's Circus, where their roads separated. Neville went off, happy, to his dark, comfortless lodgings, and Philip returned home to dinner.

By some extraordinary chance he dined *tête-à-tête* with his wife, almost for the first time since their honeymoon, and they both felt quite strange in each other's society.

"Have you any engagement for this evening, Clara?" he asked, during the course of dinner.

She looked up astonished.

"None. You know I have almost given up going out, now that my health is so bad."

"You will not go to the opera, then?"

"Certainly not."

She felt positively bewildered at this sudden interest in her movements.

"Well, you are right. It is a stupid opera this evening, and there is no ballet; though, perhaps, you do not care for that."

Clara made no reply; and her husband,

after one or two languishing attempts at conversation, became silent also.

After dinner, Philip's cab came round almost immediately. Clara was in the drawing-room, and happened to be standing at the window, which she had just opened to place a bouquet of flowers on the balcony, in the fresh air, at the moment when Philip left the house.

She saw him jump in, and then, without any intention of listening, accidentally heard him say to the servant, "Oh, just go back for the latch-key, I have forgotten it; and no one need sit up, of course. The opera will not be over till late." The groom returned directly, and, a second afterwards, the cab drove off.

Clara drew in her head, and closed the window;—there was a slight tinge of colour in her cheek. "So he is going to this stupid opera without a ballet!" she thought. "I wonder what gave him such an extreme wish to know if I intended being there?" She inherited a good deal of Lady St. Leger's sharpness in drawing unfavourable conclusions

from a word or a look ; and, after considering a few minutes by the fire, felt certain that Philip had some hidden reason for his enquiries. She rang the bell. " I shall require the carriage in half an hour," she said to the servant who entered ; " I am going to the opera, this evening." Then she went up into her dressing-room, and ordered her maid to dress her quickly, as she was going to the theatre. Her plain toilette was soon completed, and in less than half an hour she was again in the drawing-room—walking up and down with an agitated impatience, that she could not have explained to herself, for the announcement of the carriage.

The second act was just beginning as Clara reached the theatre. She was dressed plainly in a high, pearl-coloured silk, without ornament or flowers in her hair, and looked altogether so like an invalid, that her entrance was unnoticed, and no glass directed a second time to her face. Only a few of her old friends, when they happened to remark her, said,

"How awfully dear Clara was changed!" And one or two of her husband's acquaintance who knew her by sight, exclaimed, "Good heavens! can that pale, wretched-looking woman be young Earnscliffe's wife?"

Exactly opposite her was the St. Legers' box, and Clara saw her mother, all diamonds and pink satin, and looking quite young and smiling, as she talked to Prince N——, who was by her side. A bitter sense came over her of the contrast between Lady St. Leger and herself, and she thought—"It would be better for me, if I had been like her. With her jewels, and dress, and Prince N——, and all the world seeing her, my mother is perfectly happy; though her husband is playing away his very life at the hazard-table, and her only child made miserable by her own plans. I hope she may not see me to-night!" For, sensitively alive to her own deserted position, and her pale, worn cheeks, Clara shrank almost with a feeling of shame from recognition.

Her eye glanced stealthily among the stalls, where she had generally seen her husband, but he was not in his accustomed place. "I shall see him by the side of Lady N——," she thought; and she swept with her glass the long tiers of boxes—brilliant with flowers, and toilettes, and fair faces; still, she saw him nowhere. Lady N——, in all her jewels and beauty, was quietly talking, wonderful to say, to her own husband!—and, at length, wearying of the vain search, Clara gave it up for the present, and directed her attention to the scene.

Philip had called the opera a stupid one, but it contained some of Meyerbeer's most wild and spiritual thoughts; and Clara, who had a natural love for music (though, like everything else, it had been as much crushed as possible by 'education,' and having to practice on the piano for four hours a-day during eight years of her life), now forgot herself for awhile, in listening to the thrilling notes of the great master, and the sweetest of all human voices—that of Mario.

The second act terminated ; and, in the interval, Lady Clara again sought her husband among the crowds of faces which thronged the vast building. She thought every one in the theatre seemed unusually smiling and gay, and that she was the only neglected woman there. As she looked, one by one, at the young men in the pit-stalls, thinking that Philip might perhaps be among them, although he was not in his accustomed place, she observed that numbers of glasses were upturned to one stage-box—the opposite side of the house, and on so high a range that Lady Clara had not even thought of lifting her aristocratic eyes in its direction—and that many smiles and significant looks seemed to be called forth by its occupants. A feeling of curiosity made her raise her own glass to this box, where she saw a face of such surpassing loveliness as even arrested her own cold admiration—a face which, in all that crowded house of high-born beauty, had no peer. After scanning the features for a few seconds, it

occurred to her that she had seen them before; and she then remembered that they were those of Miss Elmslie, the new *danseuse*, whom she had twice seen perform. Miss Elmslie was talking gaily to some one beside her, but her head concealed the face of her companion from Clara. She felt her gaze strangely fascinated to this girl's box—although not connecting it in the least with her search for Philip—and waited patiently to catch a glimpse of its other occupant.

Rose was dressed in pale blue, with camelias and silver in her bright hair, and a little white silk opera-cloak falling back over her shoulders. She was, at this time, about twenty, but scarcely appeared so old—her slight form, delicate features, brilliant complexion, and large blue eyes, being all of that cast which generally give an appearance of extreme youth. She held a profusion of rare hot-house flowers in her hand, and appeared very animated—smiling and blushing, and repeatedly hiding her face in her rich bouquet at her

companion's remarks. Suddenly she half stood up to look at something in a distant part of the house, and, after a minute, reseated herself, with some slight change of attitude, so that the face of her companion was left fully visible to Lady Clara. It was her husband !

So this was the cause of his inquiries about Clara's movements !

She had long known that Philip was more than indifferent to her, and that his life was the careless and dissipated one of most young men of his age ; but that was all. Now she saw him publicly in the company of a dancer—and to be an actress of any kind, was, according to her ideas, for a woman to be utterly worthless—with all the world seeing him, and remarking, as she thought, with malicious pleasure, upon the scene.

At that unfortunate moment, some people in the next box began talking about Earnscliffe. They were perfect strangers to her, of course ; and had probably not even noticed their pale, sickly-looking neighbour.

“ Oh, yes ! ” said an old gentleman of the party, in answer to some remark she had not heard ; “ he married a daughter of Lord St. Leger, and dearly she must pay for her folly in marrying a genius. Such a dissipated life as he leads—always among actors and those sort of people ! There, he is at this moment sitting by Miss Elmslie, the dancer, while his wife, poor creature ! is probably watching it from an opposite box.”

“ Oh, where is he ?—where is Philip Earnscliffe ? ” asked a young girl, leaning forward ; “ I should like so much to see him.”

The gentleman pointed out Earnscliffe, and some one remarked on Rose Elmslie’s great beauty.

“ And how handsome he is ! and how animated he looks ! ” said the young voice. “ Is his wife pretty, I wonder ? ”

“ Oh, no ! ” answered another lady. “ I saw her once at a concert. Quite a pale, passée-looking woman, and such a very discontented expression of face ! ”

The blood seemed to grow like ice, at Clara's heart, and her cheeks were white with wounded pride, as she listened. But she did not leave the house ; she sat throughout the whole remainder of the opera—unnoticed—alone ; with her cold hands clasped tightly together, and her eyes fixed upon Philip's handsome, animated face. She watched his attentive manner, his attitude, and could fancy the very words he was saying ; and then—but with a less deep scorn—she scanned the exquisite features of his companion, and the half-averted, half-smiling way she listened him.

The performance went on. The fullest chorus, and the whole united strength of the orchestra, were joined in the finale scene ; but Clara heard it not. Those few hateful remarks which she had caught, alone rang in her ear ; and among all the hundreds of human beings around her, she only saw two faces—Miss Elmslie's and Philip's. No woman ever went through a truer martyrdom than did Lady Clara, during that evening.

To do Philip justice, he was utterly incapable of willingly outraging his wife's feelings ; and, had he seen Clara, would that second have quitted Rose Elmslie. But he believed her at home, as she had told him she would be, and had never even glanced towards the box she occupied.

And Rose was in her most charming, winning mood ; talking so prettily and innocently, and saying she detested Count B——, and how much she wished she could leave the stage for ever. No wonder Philip's attention was fully taken up, and that he forgot all Neville's odious suspicions. He was looking on one of the loveliest forms ever given to a woman, and trying to believe that it enclosed a similar soul.

The opera concluded without Clara being aware of it ; and, as there was no ballet, everyone rose to leave. Then she saw Philip help Miss Elmslie to draw her little dainty cloak over her white shoulders, and hold the bouquet for her while she fastened her glove—paying

her all those nameless attentions which are more galling to a jealous woman when actually witnessed, than it would be merely to *hear* of some open dereliction on the part of her husband. Finally, they both left the box together, and she was reminded that she too must leave and go home.

She stood up ; but her head was giddy, and her limbs felt weak. An elderly person, who had once been her governess, and still lived with her as companion, had accompanied Lady Clara to the theatre, and she was forced to lean upon her arm for support ; but she trembled so that her attendant inquired if she were ill.

“ Let us wait until the crush is over,” Clara answered, reseating herself where the shadow of the box prevented her from being seen. “ The heat has overcome me, and I am not well this evening.”

They remained for nearly a quarter of an hour, while Clara called all her pride to aid in the struggle to nerve herself ; and then, when

there was less chance of meeting any one she knew, she drew the hood of her cloak over her face, and with a firmer step entered the lobby, which was now nearly vacant. She got to her carriage unnoticed, and drove home. On their way she spoke to her companion about the opera in a cheerful voice, and her hand no longer trembled. Every sign of weakness was over. When she reached the house she went up to the drawing-room, and ordered tea to be brought, with her usual calm manner; and, when the servant re-entered, he found his mistress seated at the table, reading. She drank a cup of tea, and attempted to eat, but the food seemed to choke her; and, after a sufficiently long pause had elapsed, she again rang the bell. Then, when her attendants had finally left her alone, she placed herself near the fire and warmed her death-cold hands, while she brooded over the cruel shock her pride had sustained.

That she would leave him—never remain another day under Philip's roof—was her

first fixed resolution. Many wives—even where previous affection existed—might, in all the heat of wounded feeling, have resolved the same. But Clara's was not a nature ever to swerve from a determined course; and, as she sat thus alone and thought of all the remarks that Philip's open devotion to an actress must have excited among her own friends that evening, her feeling towards him strengthened into actual hate, and her lips grew blanched and rigid in their stern expression.

At length she went up to her own room, and rang for her maid to undress her, as usual; but, when the girl had left the room, she rose again from her bed, and, quietly locking the door, lit her candle, and partially dressed herself in a loose morning wrapper. Then she began opening her drawers and cases, and drew from them, one after another, everything of value that she could consider as in any way belonging to, or connected with, her marriage.

One or two notes from Philip—written during their courtship—a locket containing his hair, and a miniature of him, she laid together, and gazed at them silently for a few moments. Something softer came over her face as she recalled that evening when he had generously sacrificed himself for her in the impulse of boyish kindness, and she paused, and thought of her childish days when her cousin had been her only friend.

But then she saw him again as she had done only an hour before—flushed and animated, and whispering to Rose Elmslie—and rising abruptly she flung all the little relics of his false love upon the fire. The flames danced and crackled over them in a second, and she watched with a bitter laugh the last sparks die out in her husband's love-letters before they became a mere cloud of gray film.

Then she turned to her other work. The bracelets, the tiaras, the rings—all the valuable jewels that she had received from Philip or his uncle—she divided from her own

trinkets, and, making them into a package, directed them to 'Philip Earnscliffe, Esq.,' but without note or explanation of any kind; and after this she lay down in her bed and watched.

In an hour or two she heard Philip's quiet step ascending the stairs, and the door close of his dressing-room. Her face grew a shade whiter as she murmured—'Yes—for the last time.' And then she turned her head upon her pillow and waited for the day.

CHAPTER XII.

LITTLE thinking of all the next twelve hours had in store for him, Philip went down early the following morning to call on his uncle.

He had not seen his wife ; who was indeed still in her own apartment, ripening the project which she meant in the course of the day to carry into execution—that of leaving Philip's roof for ever. When Clara's passions were roused, they were like her father's. Her jealousy of the previous evening—grown even more bitter during the long watches of the night —had deepened her former indifference to her husband into actual loathing ; and she longed

for the moment when she could disclose her scorn for him with her own lips. Still Clara had no wish to play the *rôle* of a mere jealous wife ; and she had turned over in her mind a dozen different ways of announcing her intention, without fixing upon one that should sufficiently wound his pride, yet not lower her own. She shrunk, too, from the idea of again returning to her parent's house and the companionship of Lady St. Leger ; although she felt it was the only alternative she could look forward to on leaving her own home, and that even this was better than remaining longer with her unfaithful husband.

Meanwhile, Philip rode slowly along into the country. It was a grey cold day ; leaden masses of clouds covered the whole sky, borne slowly along in an English east-wind, and the trees and distant country seemed one uniform tint of brown. It may have been the influence of the weather, or, perhaps, the natural after effects of the previous evening's excitement, but Philip's spirits were unaccountably

depressed this morning: He seemed unable to throw off the weight that was upon him, and did not once urge his horse out of a walk until he reached the lodge of Miles Earnscliffe's place—where for the first time he attempted to rouse himself a little, and cantered up the avenue.

He found old Miles confined to the house. His illness was not serious; but still it was enough to make him fretful and impatient. He was so used to a life of activity, that it galled him to remain idle in his easy-chair, instead of being out and busy in his grounds; and his reception of his nephew was not particularly amiable.

“Well, Phil, I thought you were never coming near me again; every week I see less of you now. But you knew I was ill, and, therefore, it was your duty to come, whatever your inclination prompted.”

“I have been really much engaged, uncle,” returned Philip. “My new book, you know, is in the press, and I have a great deal to do

in correcting proofs, and so on ; when it is out, I shall have more leisure time."

"Um—well, I hope you are always as profitably engaged, though I doubt it," answered Miles. "I suppose your wife takes up a great deal of your time, too?"

"Not much of that, sir, I think."

Philip saw his uncle's humour, and prepared himself for a pleasant day of it.

"Oh, I am sorry to hear it. As you *would* marry at your age, you should have tried to make her happy. How is Clara?"

"Much the same, thank you : she is never very strong ; and stays so entirely at home, that she has no chance of getting more spirits or colour."

"Philip," said Miles, sternly, and raising himself up grimly on one elbow, as was his habit when in a bad temper, "I believe your wife is a miserable woman, and that it is all your fault. You are just as dissipated—and worse than you were before you married. I know more about you than you think ; and I .

tell you frankly, I don't admire your conduct!"

"I am perfectly aware of my folly in marrying so young, sir," returned Philip, bitterly.

After a pause, Miles went on—

"I never saw such a changed face as Clara's. She was never particularly blooming; but now she looks ten years older—and so wan, and indifferent to everything. What is the matter with her, Philip? Perhaps there is a prospect of my having a grand-nephew, eh?"

"God forbid!" said Philip, hastily.

"Well, a mighty pious aspiration, certainly. People in general are pleased at the idea of having children."

"Aye, sir, when there is a home for them to be brought up in!"

"And have you no home, Philip? Do you want a larger house and establishment, or are you too proud to call yours a home, because you merely maintain it upon your allowance?"

You know well that my money will be all yours at my death, and that whatever you or Clara want you have only to ask for."

"No," answered Philip; "you are already too generous. I require nothing more in the world than money can purchase. When I spoke of home, I meant that union of heart and feeling, which never has been, and never can be, between my wife and myself. If Heaven had given me a child, it would have been, of course, brought up by its mother, and taught from its birth to be as indifferent to me as she is herself—indeed, I sometimes think Clara's feelings towards me are now those of actual dislike——"

"And whose doing is all this, Phil?" interrupted Miles. "She may be cold—I don't deny it; it is her nature; and you knew that you were marrying the daughter of Lord and Lady St. Leger: but it is not Clara's fault that, as a married man, you continue your old bachelor life, and are always philandering about after actresses and such rubbish, when

you should be at home with her, or coming to see me. Hugh ! hugh !” He coughed dismaly, and plunged the poker into the fire, before returning to the charge ; but—greatly to Philip’s relief, who did not relish the tone of his uncle’s lecture—was interrupted by the entrance of the servant with newspapers.

“ Shall I read to you ?” he asked, taking up the *Times*.

“ Yes. I am getting so blind I cannot even read for myself now”—(he had wonderfully good eyes, for his time of life, but never could be prevailed upon to use spectacles) ; “ and try to find me something worth listening to.”

Philip accordingly began, and had read the leading article half through, when Miles interrupted him with—

“ Can’t you find anything but that political stuff, nephew ? What do I care about Lord John, or Lord Aberdeen, or which of them gets the head place in the mismanagement of this country ! Do find something of general interest.”

“The parliamentary reports?”

“Worse still! There is meaning, at least, in what the *Times* writes, but none in those endless speeches; and, besides, I hate all that sickening trash of ‘the honourable member to my right,’ and ‘my noble friend in the opposition.’ Read me the city article.”

“Stay, sir, here is the arrival of the Indian mail,” said Philip, as he turned the paper.

“Well, then, read that, of course. Why did you not find it at once?”

Philip glanced his eye rapidly down the column before commencing aloud, and, after several unimportant paragraphs, some name arrested his attention. He began to read, and his hand trembled a little; then he flushed deeply—but, as he went on, every particle of colour left his face, and he became deadly pale.

“What ails you, Phil, that you change colour so?” said his uncle, rising—all his old kind manner returning in a moment. “You are ill, my boy!” and he advanced towards him.

Philip grasped the paper tighter, as though to prevent the other from reading it, and, looking up in his face, faltered out—

“Uncle, there is news—bad news—from Bombay—” Here he broke down. Miles’s face grew as white as his nephew’s, and an instinctive presentiment of the truth flashed across him. But the old man’s bold nature did not falter.

“Give me the paper, Philip,” he said, in his usual firm voice; “I can read it for myself.”

Philip let him take it, passively, from his hand, and covered his face, while Miles read the fatal paragraph. It was the intelligence of the failure of one of the largest Bombay banks, in which the greatest part of Mr. Earnscliffe’s immense capital still floated, and Philip knew that he was comparatively ruined. He dared not look up, but kept his face still buried in his hands, without the courage to speak, when a sound made him start in terror to his uncle’s side.

It was a fearful sound—half sob—half groan—wrung from the bosom of an iron man in his first moment of despair, and Philip prayed that he might never hear the like again.

He looked in his uncle's face ; it was white, and drawn as though paralysed, and under a hideous apprehension. Philip cried—

“ Oh ! speak to me—one word, dear uncle —only one word !”

“ It is all gone,” said Miles, in a low hoarse whisper. “ I am a beggar—help me to a chair, and leave me. I would be alone.”

Philip obeyed him instantly. He knew that strong, proud nature would shrink from any eye being upon him in his agony, and having assisted him to his chair, he walked to the deep bay-window of the library and remained there silent for almost an hour. During all this time Miles Earnscliffe never moved—once only did he groan ; he sat, alone in his ruin, as he had been in the weary road to success, and the iron entered into his soul in silence.

And Philip—in that terrible hour, what were his thoughts? His own fall from being Miles Earnscliffe's heir to poverty—the taunts in his own household—the falling off of friends,—did all this cross his mind?—not once. Even had he cared for money, he could have had no selfish thought then. He only saw the old man's bowed head and clutched hands; he only thought of his generous protector humbled from his high estate, and in his old age brought to the poverty he had always loathed; and slowly large tears rolled down Philip's pale cheeks, as he stood silently gazing at his uncle.

Suddenly Miles looked up.

"Come here, boy." He was at his side in a second. "You may well weep, you that were to be my heir; you are a beggar, Philip!"

"Oh, uncle! I do not think of myself; I think of you only. You have been my protector, my father—you have done all for me; and I would have given my life to save you from this."

The old man's stony gaze softened a little at Philip's warm and loving expression.

"Shall you still care for me, lad, in my ruin?" he said, helplessly.

Philip was on his knees, and seizing the cold, withered hand, he pressed it to his lips.

"As God is my Judge, I will, sir. I may have been selfish—careless of you in my own hour of success—but you shall now know all my affection for you. You received me a friendless little child — ”

"Aye; but I turned from your father, Phil," he interrupted, huskily; "and I have never seen Herbert's face so plainly as in the last hour. I mind well the letter he wrote me in his distress, and how I answered it—how I scorned his honest poverty, and insulted him and his wife. Since then, I have shut my heart to the poor in my pride of wealth, and now—I am judged."

"You have not forgotten the poor of late years, sir," answered Philip. "You have built hospitals—you have founded schools;

and many a widow and orphan have learnt to bless your name. And, oh ! whatever self-reproach you may feel with regard to any former action towards my parents, that action is more than cancelled by all you have done for their son. You have given me education, and I can now make my own way in the world."

He spoke so warmly and hopefully, that old Miles's features gradually lost something of their frightful rigidity ; and clasping his hands, he thanked Heaven that, amid the wreck of all his worldly fortunes, there was still left to him his nephew's noble heart.

" God bless you, Phil !" he said, very softly.

They remained long together, talking—not of the storm which had just burst over them—but of old happy days—of the summer excursions they had made together—of a thousand little events of Philip's boyhood. There is a strange proneness in human beings, to take refuge under the first shock of any sudden calamity, in the peaceful remembrance of the

past ; as though, in that brief hour, the heart tried to concentrate all that life has known of sweetness, before attempting to confront the stern and present reality. And this is especially the case when, as with Miles Earnscliffe, no vision of the future can offer anything half so bright again.

But this passed, after a time : he relapsed into vacant silence : and then, starting up as though the truth had only just burst in all its fullness upon him, exclaimed—

“ I will not believe it ! What, all gone—the labours of thirty years ! Read it again, Phil.—it is false—a newspaper lie—I am not a beggar. Read it, I say ! ”

And he fixed a look, almost of fierce hope, upon his nephew, as he again took the paper, which went to Philip’s heart.

“ There is no doubt of its correctness, sir, I fear,” he replied, in a low voice, after reading the paragraph once more. “ And we must not buoy ourselves up on any frail hopes of that kind. But neither will you be, by any means

brought to what the world calls poverty. Your estate in Yorkshire, and this very house, form in themselves a fortune that to many a man would seem riches."

"I shall not be an actual beggar, nephew, I know," answered Miles, bitterly. "But think what I was. Dukes glad to sit at my table—even royalty smiling at me—an earl proud to marry his daughter into my family. Good God, Philip!" he exclaimed, the thought crossing him for the first time, "what will those people say to my ruin? and your wife! Ah! there lies the deepest of my humiliation."

Philip felt this too, fully as deeply as his uncle; but he said little on the subject, and merely observed that it was not unlikely Clara's character might shine out in his adversity, far more brightly than it had hitherto done. 'It was a woman's nature,' he said, 'to become more soft and gentle in time of trial; and after the unvarying kindness shown to her by his uncle, it was impossible for her to entertain any feeling but that of sorrow for

him now.' "And as to the St. Legers," added Philip, "it matters little to us what they do or say. They will merely follow in the track of the other worldly acquaintance who will fall away at the first breath of our altered fortunes."

He stayed long; and his kindly consolation was some comfort to Miles, who gradually became more natural in his manner—less helpless, and more bitter, which, for him, was the best possible sign; and at length the unyielding spirit, which, through years of drudgery and disappointment had never flinched, again began to rise with an elasticity wonderful in so old a man.

By the time Philip left him, he was deep in accounts in his study; calculating upon the wreck of his fortunes, and with his old business habits, already writing letters to his different agents, and planning for the realization of the comparatively small sum which remained to him.

“ Well—Good bye, Phil ! ” were his last words. “ And, if your wife and grand friends cast you off in our ruin, return to me. I shall still have enough for both of us ! ”

CHAPTER XIII.

It was dusk when Philip returned to town; but this time he rode on fast, and lingered not on the road. The storm, whose distant coming he had instinctively felt that morning, had burst ; and now, with his head erect, and something of the same feeling in his breast which as a boy had made him love to battle with the waves, he prepared to stem the real sea of life under its new aspect.

Totally apart from his sympathy with his uncle, it would not be too much to say that Philip's feelings were happy ones. His existence had hitherto been barren of many deep

emotions—for his age, he had had too few struggles with difficulty—all that he had wished for he had won. “Now,” he felt, with a thrill of conscious power in himself, “my life begins in earnest. I am Philip Earnscliffe, the author, not Miles Earnscliffe’s heir. I must depend upon myself alone, and fight my own battle.” And his eye dilated at the thought.

He rode on, and was soon in the streets of London—where the man of fortune, or beggared outcast, become alike, in the immense surge of human life an unnoticed unit—and Philip thought that everything around seemed altered. The yellow lamps struggling through the dense fog—the confused roar of life in which no one sound predominates—the shops, with their gaudy windows, and sickly apprentices behind the counter—but, above all, the aspect of his fellow-men about him—struck him differently to what it had all done hundred of times before. He looked at the miserable beings on the pavement—the common street-beggar

—the greasy pickpocket—the black-coated hypocrite, with tracts—the drunken lad of seventeen—men, lounging idle and desperate, who should have been, like himself, in the very prime of life—little children, with the expression of premature age upon their stolid features, and attempting to extort alms with the whine of already practised imposture—and, worst of all, girlish faces, where the lingering traces of youth and womanhood were all blurred over with bold vice, or sunken in the approach of a hopeless death. And Philip felt—“And I—with all these fallen beings around me, and the intellect and powers God has given me—how have I fulfilled my mission, or attempted to raise the lot of one fellow-man? By writing books for society, and verses for albums! It is indeed time some shock should come, to rouse me from my wasted existence!”

Then he looked at another class of men: clerks from the city—artists from their studios—professors from their lectures—who

were all hurrying to their homes through the dusky streets ; and he felt, with pride, that he should now be one of them—one of those who work, and in some way contribute to the general good of the world.

The magnificent horse he rode did not seem his own ; when he arrived at the door of his house in Park Lane, he felt that it was his home no longer, and almost rejoiced in the thought. “ I was born to work,” he said, “ and all the false advantages of riches and position have been only bars to my success.”

He enquired in a cheerful tone for Lady Clara, and, on hearing that she was in the drawing-room, and alone, proceeded at once up stairs. But the bravest man in the world is not always so in his own household ; and every step that Philip ascended, he seemed to feel his courage ebb in an inverse ratio. By the time he reached the first landing, he had painted Clara to himself, in one of her coldest, most cynical moods—and when he got to the drawing-room door, would sooner have announced

his fallen fortunes to every acquaintance in London at once, than in this *tête-à-tête* interview to his wife.

He opened the door, and saw her. Not cowering before the fire as usual in the dark; but seated at the table, very erect, very well dressed, and writing; and Philip took this as a bad omen.

Clara had made all her arrangements during his absence, and had had a long conversation with her mother, after which—much against Lady St. Leger's will—it had been decided that she should return that evening to her father's house. Lady St. Leger hated the vulgar *éclat* of such a proceeding, and was also by no means anxious for her daughter's companionship.

"You are acting madly, Clara," she urged, "and will bitterly repent this false step. You say you do not love Philip—well—I suppose you never did—but still he is your husband, and some day will inherit his uncle's fortune. Now, you know that you have no settlements, and

therefore, in leaving him, you at once forfeit all chance of benefiting by the old man's death—for it is not likely Philip would ask you to return to him *then*—and besides, all these things are bad in themselves; anything approaching to a scene, or publishing her domestic grievances to the world, should be avoided by a woman of good taste. Your husband's talents secure him a place in society, and your position as his wife is far better than it will ever be, as Lord St. Leger's neglected daughter. Young, handsome, and rich, every one will be on his side; and to me falls the ridiculous *rôle* of chaperoning a married daughter—and you really have aged terribly lately—who could not agree with her own husband."

" You may set your mind at rest, mother," answered Clara, " I shall never appear in society, or interfere with you in any way. I only ask a place in your house, instead of living alone—at which the world, I suppose, would cavil, old and plain though I have become. But you seem to overlook, entirely,'

she added, bitterly, "my reason for leaving Mr. Earnscliffe."

"Not in the least—and it is that which makes it more absurd. You see your husband at the opera, in the same box with an actress, or dancer, or some person of the kind, and you immediately draw all sorts of conclusions from this trivial circumstance, and then decide upon the grave step of a separation. What can be more natural than for a young man of his age, to be led into such society? what more usual? Why, half the wives of London might leave their homes for such a ridiculous cause; and your not caring about Philip, makes it doubly incomprehensible to me, why you should be jealous! If you had gone more into the world, as I advised you from the first, and formed friendships and amusements for yourself, you would have been happy without troubling yourself about his proceedings. Look at me, Clara! do you think I should look as I do now, if I had worried myself at every neglect or indiscretion of

my husband as you do? Yet I was much more attached to your father, than you are to Philip!"

Clara did look at her mother's still fresh, well-preserved face; and she answered with a compressed lip; "Yes—it would have been far better for me to be like you—but I am not!"

No arguments of Lady St. Leger having prevailed, it was at length decided—much to her annoyance—that she should expect her daughter that evening; and Clara awaited Philip's return, to communicate her intentions to him personally. He remained away so long, however, that she at length thought he would not return for the day, and had just begun a letter to him, when she heard his knock at the door. She felt a momentary tremour at the sound; but quickly recovered her composure, and was completely nerved for the approaching scene, when Philip entered the room. The opening of the attack she left to chance, having failed in planning any to

her own satisfaction. She had quite resolved he should never know that jealousy of a dancer was the immediate cause of her resolution ; and she would therefore be obliged to urge it on the general grounds of his neglect and her indifference.

“ Good evening, Clara.”

She laid down her pen, and looked at him. He was very pale ; and his features were set as though under the influence of some strong emotion.

“ He actually cowers before me ! ” she thought ; and, with a scornful half-smile, returned his salutation.

“ If she has any of a woman’s best nature left, she will soften now,” thought Philip ; and, advancing to her side, he stooped and kissed her forehead. But she turned haughtily from his caress—which to her seemed only a mean attempt at conciliation—and remarked —“ You look agitated, Mr. Earnscliffe ; to what am I to attribute all this sudden outbreak of affection ? ”

The chilling tone of these words, and the look that accompanied them, froze back Philip's half-awakened feelings of kindness. He seated himself on the other side of the fire, and remained silent, considering how he should best announce his uncle's ruin to his cold, worldly companion.

"I have been to the Oaks to-day, Clara." She did not answer. "My uncle is not well, and is confined to the house; he made many kind inquiries for you."

"Really—I am greatly indebted to Mr. Earnscliffe. And these kind inquiries you were doubtless able to answer fully, as you know so much of my health and life."

"Oh, Clara!" said Philip, suddenly, looking very full at her as he spoke, "do not reproach me to-day—I have had much to bear already."

"Indeed!—May I ask you not to communicate any particulars of your trials to me? they must be of a nature in which it is impossible for me to have any interest!" and half-

rising towards the light, she looked at her watch.

Philip was stung with this assumption of indifference, and answered—"They are of a nature, Lady Clara, in which you *must* take an interest, and, if not told you by my lips, you will hear them from a hundred others tomorrow."

"Oh ! perhaps your new book—you have been writing one, I believe—is a failure ; if so, the event, of course, is not so serious to the world and to me, as to yourself—"

He did not answer : but fixed his eyes—more in sorrow than with a harsher feeling—upon her face for a few seconds.

"It is strange," he said, at length, and as though to himself, "that she should have fixed upon this day as a fitting time to declare her indifference to me." And, even as he spoke, something in the soft tone of his voice thrilled through her heart. But the better feeling soon passed.

"As well this day as another," she returned:

“The fact has long been so—why should I conceal it any longer? As you have thrown off the mask, so may I.”

Philip scarcely heard her words. For the second time in his married life, the image of his rough unpolished uncle rose up brightly before him, compared with that of his high-born wife; and he remembered how, amidst his own anguish, the old man had still spoken kindly to him.

“Clara,” he resumed. “I have no wish to deny any of my errors, or that you have grave cause for complaint. But remember one thing, whatever my conduct has been, my uncle has ever felt kindly towards you—and even this morning—”

“And what have I to do with Mr. Miles Earnscliffe’s kindness?” she interrupted, haughtily, “and for what object are you wasting these sentimental speeches upon me? You mistake me strangely, sir, if you think that I care for your uncle’s regard, or his wealth either!”

“And you mistake *me*,” cried Philip, starting to his feet. “You mistake me strangely if you think that for my own sake, I am endeavouring to soften a heart like yours. I was preparing to tell you, madam, of the ruin of an honest man. You need sneer no longer at my uncle’s wealth—he has lost it. Yes, it is true—and I, Lady Clara, am no longer the heir you married—but a poor struggling author.” And, folding his arms, he looked her full in the face.

She turned very pale, and did not answer. For only one second her better nature made her long to fall upon his neck, and return to him in his hour of trial—then the impulse passed. She was incapable of judging a generous nature like Philip’s; she had known none but people steeped in worldliness, from her very cradle; and in his altered manner, she only saw some selfish project upon her father’s wealth. Now, she thought, she could reject him—wound him to the very quick—without betraying her own jealousy, or lowering

herself. And with her most cutting smile she remarked—

“ Oh ! then this is the cause of your returned affection, Mr. Earnscliffe.”

“ Hear me, Clara,” said Philip, with grave dignity. “ Under my fallen prospects, I feel that, in spite of the cold, unnatural way in which it has been your choice that we should live together, you are still my wife. You married me under different circumstances, and for your sake, next to his own, I grieve most at my uncle’s ruin. You never loved me ; and it may appear hard that your unhappy married life should be deprived also of the prospect of wealth, under which it was undertaken. These considerations, I confess, gave me a return of warmer feelings towards you, which you reject ; and if you see in this, any subject for ridicule, I can only pity your own hard nature, not be ashamed of my motives.”

But Clara only heard his allusion to her marrying him for money, and her eyes flashed fire.

"You do well," she cried, "to remind me, now, in your ruin, of my marriage with you ! You do well to remind me of my motives, now that they are rendered fruitless ! Yes ! I married you, as I thought, to save my father from disgrace—although in that, too, I was mistaken, for I know how you have turned from him in his difficulties—I married you simply and exclusively for money. I never loved you—no—not in the moment when I consented to become your wife. You have heard it all, now!"

"And I, Lady Clara," replied Philip, stung out of all generosity, "do you know why I married you?"

"Tell me," she answered—her blue eyes filled with lurid rage. But even yet he forbore.

"No, madam, I will not ; your mother will do so far better than I can. I will only say that, even in my marriage, the most bitterly regretted act of my whole life, I would not ex-

change the motives which prompted me for your own."

"Go on, sir," she cried, scarcely knowing what she said, "go on—and tell me that, deluded by my mother's falsehood, you married me from pity. I will hear all that you have to say, and then—then you shall hear me."

"Clara," returned Philip, and he advanced a step towards her, his face softening once more, "still I ask you to forbear. This is not a time for recriminations; now, if ever, we should remember all that we have once vowed to each other. I have erred against you—I have neglected you—and I confess it. Forgive me—return to me in my poverty—and forget the first cold year of our married life!" and he held out his hand to his wife.

She recoiled from him, and, with all the expression of concentrated scorn that could be thrown into look and voice, replied, "Stay, sir, do not degrade yourself by any more mean attempts to conciliate me. I understand your

object well, and scorn it and you. Hitherto, in your pride of plebeian wealth, you have not cared to court me for my father's money, but now, in your ruin, you—aye, and your uncle too—will both fawn and cringe, and lick the dust before the very woman whom you insulted yesterday with your neglect. Your uncle—”

But Philip's iron grasp upon her arm arrested her. Every gentler feeling was dead for ever in his breast towards her; and his dark eyes kindled again with passion at her taunts.

“Stop, madam,” he said;—his voice low and ominously calm—“I command you to stop, and hear me. You have just uttered thoughts that could only have had birth in the heart of Lord St. Leger's daughter; and you know that your imputation is untrue. As you won, so you discard me—with a falsehood; and it is a worthy ending of our hateful union. My uncle, Lady Clara, and myself, are men of honour, and would both of us sooner starve

than accept money which had been tainted by passing through the hands of your father. You can return to him, and to his wealth, at once. From this moment you are no longer my wife, even in the eyes of the world ; and the day of my fall from fortune will be the sweetest of my life, as the last of my connection with you !”

They were the harshest words ever spoken by Philip to a woman ; and could only have been wrung from him by Clara’s insult to his uncle—but his blood was on fire, and he heeded not what he said. Both remained silent for some seconds ; then Clara rose.

“ Do not think, Mr. Earnscliffe, that you are the first to propose this step,” she said. “ My arrangements are already made for quitting your house ; and my parents are prepared to receive me this evening. Before I heard of your beggary, I had resolved to separate from you for ever, and to leave you to your own course of life, and your own associates. In this case”—she pointed to one on the table—

“you will find all the jewels I have received from your uncle or yourself; and, if you have any further communications to make to me on business, you will have the goodness to do so through my father’s solicitor. And now, I presume, I can leave your house at once. There can be nothing more for you to say, or for me to hear!” And she moved towards the door.

“Nothing!” echoed Philip — “nothing. Thank God, no child of mine can call you mother! and that, in this moment, I have no one softer feeling—no duty pleading for you in my heart. Go, madam! return to your parents’ house; you are far fitter to be their daughter than the wife of an honest man!” And he turned away, and buried his face between his hands.

In another moment the door closed after her. The carriage, which was ordered to convey her to her father’s, was already waiting, and in a quarter of an hour she had left the house, and Philip and his wife were parted for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

EARNSCLIFFE little knew, at first, the full extent to which his uncle's losses would affect himself. With all the romance of his character, he had pictured his new life as merely freed from the artificial trammels of society, and more like that of his friend Neville's, and had felt a sort of pleasure at the thought. The reality was such as he never dreamed of.

All the world had hitherto been on his side on the point of his domestic grievances. Lady Clara, in her gloomy seclusion, had had few supporters; while all—even her own relations—had smiled on her young, handsome, and rich husband; and, had their separation

taken place a month earlier, it is probable that everyone would have pronounced in Philip's favour. But the news of Miles Earnscliffe's ruin, and of Clara's return to her father's protection, fell on the greedy ear of the world at the same time; and the feeling awakened by the first intelligence greatly influenced the verdict upon the latter.

Philip had so long been the universal favourite—the fashion in London—that people looked upon his fall from wealth as a sort of insult to their own judgment. The failure of Miles Earnscliffe was a thing the probability of which had never been admitted by even the most suspicious—indeed, it was generally believed that the old merchant's fortune had been long withdrawn from the uncertain field of speculation, and vested in English securities. When, therefore, the sudden news of his ruin was made known, the general feeling towards him was not one of pity, but indignation. From unfounded remarks arose reports; these quickly strengthened into facts; and in a few

days Miles Earnscliffe was successively pronounced an unprincipled speculator, a man who originally amassed his fortune by fraud, and had now lost it through the discovery of the swindle. For the directors of the Bombay Bank, whose failure had ruined him, were in truth by no means clear from the imputation of dishonour; and the world, merely confounding the sufferer with the delinquent, decreed that old Miles was not only ruined, but infamous!

Philip, it was admitted, had nothing to do with this; but he was a coxcomb, a *parvenu*, and a bad husband; while, by a natural conclusion, Lady Clara was soon elevated to the position of an injured woman, a long suffering angel, and a martyr. And Lady St. Leger, who had so strongly opposed her daughter's separation from Philip, was agreeably surprised at suddenly finding herself quite the fashion in consequence of this event.

Clara, however, received the advances of her friends with even more than her accustomed coldness. She would go into no society,

and kept as much aloof from her own mother as was possible ; above all, she hated to hear her husband's name, or that of his uncle mentioned before her. In her own heart she had felt, after the first burst of passion was over, the falseness of the accusation she had made to Philip. Now that they were actually parted for ever, she began tardily to acknowledge to herself the real nobleness of his character ; and—with strange, yet not uncommon inconsistency—half believed she loved her husband, now that it was too late. She remembered his youth—his generosity in marrying her—how unsuited her character, in its utter worldliness, must have been to his own—and she framed a thousand excuses for his love of more congenial society ; and even for that last open dereliction which had been the immediate cause of their separation.

In her long sleepless nights she recalled their parting interview, and saw herself, harsh, unwomanly, unforgiving ; taunting him on his uncle's affliction, and imputing sordid motives

to himself—while he had forborn so long, and still tried to reconcile her. She thought of him now—the world turning from him as it should have done from guilt, not misfortune—and her proud misguided heart—which might have been a gentle and loving one, had she been differently educated—throbbed for Philip in his loneliness, as it had never done in his popularity and success ; and often in tears and self-reproach, she longed to be at his side.

But he never knew this. Clara would have died sooner than reveal to human ear that she repented her own act ; and through all her after life Philip Earnscliffe never heard again from his wife.

The house in Park Lane was of course given up at once ; and Philip returned to his uncle's for the present, until the future plans of both should be decided. Miles, though no longer a millionaire, was, after all, very far from being a ruined man ; and on the proceeds of the sale of his Yorkshire estate, he found that he might still continue to live in his present house—a

great consolation to the old man, to whom his home was endeared by all the recollections of Philip's childhood. His tens of thousands had been reduced to hundreds ; but he had an income, even now, which, although poverty in the eyes of the world, would to his brother Herbert have appeared riches.

"I shall not have to lessen your allowance more than half, Phil." was one of his first remarks after the winding-up of his affairs. But the burning flush which rose in Philip's cheek as he refused to receive one farthing more in the way of assistance from his uncle, was too sincere a proof of his sentiments for Miles to press the subject.

"I am fully able to work for myself," he answered. "And for my own sake, I am thankful that it is my lot to do so. I abhor the very mention of riches, as I do the people who have cringed to us for them so long !" Philip had heard more of the evil reports about his uncle than had come to the old man's own knowledge, and his disgust was consequently

bitterer against the world where they were circulated.

He shrank with almost morbid sensitiveness from any mention of money ; and, innocent though he felt himself—conscious of his uncle's entire integrity through his whole lifetime—he yet could not bear to be seen by his old associates, while the imputation of dis-honour was upon their name, avoiding even the society of the few friends he possessed, who really sympathized with him in his trial. Poverty would have been nothing to Philip ; but the falsehood which was now current in the world was so unexpected a blow, that he staggered and felt powerless under the shock. It was his first great trial ; and he felt it with all the keen and passionate grief of youth. But there was still more awaiting him.

His new book was now ready, and he determined that it should come out at once, though his friendly publishers—with a truer know-ledge of the world, and a real regard for his interest—intreated him to delay its appear-

ance until another season, or at least, till the present tide of public opinion had somewhat turned. Philip firmly refused to do so.

“What have my private affairs to do with my writings?” he argued. “Or how can it affect the merit of a book, that the author has suddenly become a poor man, and that his wife and friends have chosen to leave him?—No, it shall appear—and stand or fall upon its own worth. I am sick of success that I have not really won for myself!” And the publishers were forced to comply.

The book did appear, and was a dead failure. Only the few grave and honest critics who had warned the young author of the faults in his second work, acknowledged the real genius and increased powers of his present one, and encouraged him to proceed. The fashionable papers, by one accord, and also many of the literary journals, abused the book without measure. It was stupid—frivolous—impertinent—without talent and without principles; and one evening paper went so far

as to say, “The work was only what might be expected from such a pen, and was literally unfit for a drawing-room table.”

Philip read all these criticisms of course ; it was his principle employment to do so in his loneliness and disappointment ; but when he glanced over the one last alluded to, a bitterer expression than usual escaped his lips. He remembered the two columns of fulsome praise upon his second book, which had appeared in this very paper, at the time that he was in the zenith of his popularity—praise which then had disgusted him, from its excess, and total want of discrimination—and contrasted them in his mind, with the few lines of malevolent abuse bestowed now upon his last, and far superior work.

“It is well,” thought Earnscliffe, as he laid down the paper. “These gentlemen are doing me a far greater service than even the few kindly critics, who have tried to stem, in my favour, the tide of fashionable opinion. My next book will be one that shall seek its

success in the *world*. It shall be written, not for the flimsy praise of May Fair, or the applause of evening papers, but for the people—the working and honest people—of whose wrongs I will become the advocate, while I expose that society whose leaders have now cast me off."

And Philip fulfilled his words.

He took an obscure lodging not far from his friend Neville—for he had a longing to be perfectly alone—and began working with a fervour and perseverance astonishing to the artist, who had hitherto only seen in Philip a gentle indolent boy, with genius, but scarcely ambition enough to become really great. Now, in a few weeks, he seemed transformed into a hardworking, untiring, practical man. His style altered with his character. It lost the old careless diction, the sunny enthusiasm, the *youthfulness*, which had constituted the peculiar charm of his earlier writings, and became earnest—manly—more forcible.

The vein of sarcasm that merely ran lightly

through his first works, and scarcely tinged them, had now grown caustic and bitter, colouring his whole thoughts. He showed up, with no sparing hand, the vices and foibles of those few hundreds of persons in Belgravia, who call themselves the world—sketching many a well known character with a few terse words of ridicule that yet rendered the likeness to perfection, and were more biting from their brevity. Above all, he laid bare that hideous Mammon-worship, which lies at the very heart of English society—making the fairest and first-born among us bow down with smiles before a railway schemer, who has succeeded through dishonesty, or a profligate eastern monster, whose atrocities are as well known as the number of his lacs of rupees. It was a subject on which Philip felt keenly, and about which—although with some pardonable excess of bitterness, and slight exaggeration—he wrote well. But it was not one to win back his lost popularity among his former friends.

In his second volume he turned to another class of English people ; and dwelt eloquently

upon the long-suffering, the patient-abiding, the wrongs of the labouring poor, whose masses make up the real bulk of society, and from their ranks the main characters of the story were taken.

It was, emphatically, a book of, and for, the people; and not all the critics in London could have prevented its becoming popular. But, if it had appeared with another name, few could have suspected that its author, and the author of the graceful tales and ballads which had adorned so many a silken boudoir, was the same.

Neville watched his friend's progress with undisguised pleasure. He had always regretted the kind of life into which Philip had been so long drawn by his position; and he would now frequently say—"Ah, Phil! the best day in your life was that when your uncle's smash came—your great friends withdrew—and your wife was good enough to leave you. It was really far better luck than you deserved."

Philip always tried to agree with him; but

every week he looked more worn and old. Although energetic when under the influence of some strong excitement—as was now the case—his temperament was not suited for battling with disappointment and rebuffs, like the artist's. He had no natural ‘genius for plodding,’ as Neville called it; and while his book proceeded rapidly, he grew paler and paler in his confined lodgings, and sometimes wondered within himself if he really were born for this kind of life, as on the first evening of his changed fortunes he had decided.

Meantime Neville's pictures were finished and sold; and, as he had nothing more to detain him in town, his small arrangements were speedily made for his departure to the continent.

Philip went to his lodgings the evening before he was to leave, and found him, as usual, in his close room—his one portmanteau and his painting-box standing packed under the table, and the artist himself seated at the solitary window, which overloooked a sultry

back street and a greengrocer's shop, but with a more radiant expression than Philip had ever remarked upon his face, among all the glories of a Highland sunset.

"Here you are, Philip!" he cried, gaily, as his friend entered. "I thought I should see you this last evening; and, by Jove! I only wish you were coming away with me to-morrow—that is, of course, if you were as free as I am. I am not much given to bursts of enthusiasm—as you know—but I do feel singularly happy to-day, and should like to think we were to spend the coming summer together, as we did the last."

"You *look* happy," said Philip, as he possessed himself of the artist's other chair, and gazed half enviously at his bright countenance.
"The world goes well with you, Neville."

"Yes, I make it do so! It is no surprise at unlooked-for success which makes me in good spirits, this evening—but merely a feeling of contentment, at finding how things turn out precisely as I intended they should—how

singularly we can rule our own destiny ! You know how I have slaved, for the last seven months, upon those pictures—they are now completed and sold exactly at the time I had fixed ; and to-day—the thirtieth of June, as I thought—I am sitting, for the last time in this room, where I have worked for four uphill years, and am closing the first period in my life. My old easel I have presented to my landlady, for firewood ; and to-morrow I start (without a regret, Phil, except that I shall not see you again for two years), and shall spend the summer sketching in Switzerland—next winter in Rome.”

“Yours is a happier organization than mine,” replied Philip. “I should feel a regret at sitting at my window for the last time, and giving up my easel for firewood, after it had been my friend during four years.”

Neville laughed aloud. “It is not in my nature to create sorrows,” he answered. “I am not a poet, and have no poetic tendencies whatever ; and I am happy to think that you

are fast losing yours. Just retain as much sentiment as is wanted for the tender part of your books, and discard all the rest from your own life ; you will find quite enough to regret in the world, without wasting your sympathies on old easels. By-the-bye—what are Fridoline, and Rose, and all those people about ? Have you given them up, as well as the grand world ?”

“ They at least have not given *me* up,” returned Philip. “ I have seen little of Fridoline lately—indeed, I have had time for nothing but writing—but I hear she is progressing wonderfully in her profession, and receives an enormous salary at St. James’s. You would scarcely believe, Neville, how much feeling some of ‘those people’—as you call them—showed when I lost my expectations of wealth and my literary reputation at one blow. Celeste, poor thing, shed real tears—oh ! you may smile—over the criticisms in some of the papers, which she managed to understand—and Fridoline—”

“And Rose?” interrupted Neville, in his old tone.

“No, Neville, thank you,” said Philip, reddening; “we will not broach that subject, if you please. You know that I am not a fit person to listen to Rose Elmslie’s detractors ; and also that I have too few illusions left to be desirous of sacrificing any more ! Against my own senses, I shall retain my former opinion of Rose, and therefore would rather not speak of her to you.”

“Well, taking that view of it, you are acting rightly,” returned Neville. “Like the nobleman, who paid his valet three hundred a-year to cheat him openly. You say to yourself that you are a happy man, and shut your eyes, when you see Rose driving in Count B——’s pony carriage. How far have you advanced in your book ?”

“Oh ! it is more than half finished. In a month I shall go off to the sea-side and complete it there ; for I am actually ill in this hot close air of London. It will be published by

next winter, and I will write and tell you of its success—ill or good."

"Do so. No one will be more interested in it than myself, and I shall be delighted if you would join me in Italy afterwards."

"I shall like it extremely if I were able, but—"

"Well—I don't see what there is to keep you in England. You say you hate parties and theatres now. Your wife is certainly no longer the attraction—surely you will not begin writing another book directly. It would be much better for you to give your brain a rest, and come to Italy for a stock of new ideas. I am positive the artist-life in Rome would suit us both."

"Yes—" said Philip, hesitating. "It would be very pleasant—but you see I have ties to England. My uncle is an old man, and has none belonging to him but me—for his sake I feel myself in some measure bound—"

"A convenient excuse!" exclaimed Neville. "I wish it were the real reason. However,

the longest road has some turning, and I am sure your present weakness cannot be eternal. When that is over, you will find that you can make up your mind to leave your excellent uncle for a year, or even two—without the separation breaking anybody's heart!"

"But you forget that I am a poor man now. It is an expensive thing travelling in Italy!"

"Oh! you always talk as though you were actual beggars—when at this moment, Mr. Miles continues to live in a house, I consider a palace, and you have nearly finished a new novel, for which you will have six or seven hundred pounds—at least—"

"Or half—or a quarter the sum," interrupted Philip. "After my last dead failure, publishers will be rather shy of offering to purchase my works!"

"Then publish on your own account; your new book must succeed."

They talked together until past midnight. Then Philip, after a hearty farewell, took his

leave ; and by five o'clock next morning, Neville was driving along through the interminable streets, leading to St. Katherine's wharf, where he embarked for Rotterdam.

Philip felt a heavy sense of loneliness when he was gone. He missed Neville's cheerful face more than he had expected—his friendlessness oppressed him. There were long weary hours when his brain refused to work, and his eyes were hot and heavy ; and then he longed most for youthful companionship, and so—gradually took refuge more and more in society of poor Rose.

She was always ready to smile upon him. Without much real depth of feeling, the innocence of her early country life, gave her a tone unlike other women of her class—she was gentle, often sad : for the sentiment she really bore to Philip (the only approach to a true one in her whole existence) made her at times hate herself and her life, and when she was with him, her eyes would fill with tears, and her voice tremble. In an hour after he had left the momentary impulse was gone ; and in

the society of Count B——, or at the gay suppers after the ballet, Rose was again the light, reckless, high-spirited actress. But while her softer mood was upon her (and that was as he always saw her) it gave her a charm in Philip's eyes, greater even than her beauty, and every day this fascination increased.

Still, Earnscliffe did not love her. There was something within him which instinctively made him shrink from loving any woman in her position. His naturally refined taste, and poetic notions about what women should be, had made him from his boyhood feel differently to other young men on such subjects ; and he knew that the moment in which he was forced to see Rose as she really was, he would leave her for ever. But, in the meantime, her beauty attracted him irresistibly. Amid his desolation and disappointment, he would gaze on her sweet young face, and listen to her low voice, and try to persuade himself that his Egeria was really found.

While, still, in his own heart, he knew that it was a false one !

CHAPTER XV.

TOWARDS the middle of October Philip's book was finished: He had spent the entire summer at a quiet watering-place on the south coast, accompanied by his uncle, who seemed unwilling to part with him for a single week. The loss of his property had strangely softened the hard character of Miles. Nothing now gave him such pleasure as to walk up and down on the beach, listening to the waves, and watching the children who played with them, and gathered treasures by their side; or, in stormy weather, to sit at the window, which overlooked the sea, and gaze out at the

scene before him. He would remain thus for hours patiently, while Philip was writing in another part of the room—not speaking for fear of interrupting him, and seeking no employment for himself; but when Philip, at length, would say—"Now, sir, I have done work for to-day," the old man's face grew bright in a second; and when his nephew came and sat by him, to read aloud something he had written, or talk over old times, he was happy for the remainder of the evening.

Philip was glad to see his uncle in this altered state of mind, but to himself the quiet monotony of their days was often galling. In the prime of youth and energy, he longed to cast himself again into the throng of life, and, by some new and brilliant success, wipe out the remembrance of his failure, and the stigma upon his uncle's name. It is only after a certain age, that solitude can be welcome in grief and disappointment—it is never so in youth. After the first blow—the first shrinking from the world is over—the natural re-action must

always be to face the struggle again, and win back the lost object, or forget it in the pursuit of a fresh desire.

They returned to Miles's house in November, and in due time the book appeared; but neither of his earlier productions had met with success such as awaited this one. Philip was himself astonished at it. Edition after edition was called for, and, in a few months, Philip found his popularity established upon a far surer base than it had ever been before—the general good opinion of the middle classes. He had become one of the favourite writers of the day.

Still, he felt in his own heart that the first pleasure in success was gone. He had fulfilled his desire of brilliantly effacing his literary failure; and the fickle voice of the public had already recanted, under the influence of his new triumph, the former base reports about old Miles; but the zest—the freshness of life was over! He did not doubt the sincerity of his friends, but he wished to be free from

them and the whole world. Having achieved the victory, he cared not to wear the laurels ; and he began seriously to think of joining Neville, or, at least, of going abroad for a time. He had often wished to visit the wild parts of western France—where the artist had once spent some months, and which he had described, in all its savage loneliness, to Philip—and he now thought he would like to spend the summer in accomplishing this, and afterwards go to Rome, for the winter. The extraordinary success of his last work had supplied him amply with means for travelling, and he felt that a long rest and perfect change would be necessary for his over-worked brain, before writing again.

Only two objections weighed against this project ; the first was leaving his uncle. The delight of Miles at his newly-arisen fame was far greater than his own. It had cheered the old man more than anything that had occurred since his own losses ; and the first tears Philip had ever seen him shed, glistened in his eyes

as he read over the different criticisms upon his boy's book. He thought Philip would now be contented and happy, and willing to live quietly with him, as in his young days ; and when one day he distantly hinted at his idea of going abroad for a year or two, the look of bitter disappointment which crossed his uncle's face, touched Philip deeply, and he resolved to say no more on the subject.

But when, day by day, he still looked paler, while his spirits did not improve, Miles himself began to think it might be really well for him to have a change of scene for awhile ; and, striving to forget what his own loneliness would be without him, he, at length, told Philip he thought it would be better that he should go abroad—for the summer, at least. And Philip, not realizing to the full the sacrifice these words cost Miles, felt glad that the old man was reconciled to parting with him, and that only one more inducement to remain in England still existed.

This inducement, however, was a strong

one ; and Philip had wavered again and again before he could resolve upon going abroad, when a circumstance occurred, which, although trivial in itself, had the effect of disenchanting him for ever with his last illusion (as he termed his feeling towards Rose, when speak-of it to the artist), and indirectly influenced much of Philip's after-life.

One bright spring morning, he went, at his usual hour, to call on Miss Elmslie. She was always glad to see him ; but he thought he detected on this occasion a slight embarrassment in her manner when he entered, although she strove hard to conceal it. She was seated at an embossed and gaily-coloured writing-table, near one of the windows, and, immediately closing the portfolio before her, she rose to meet Philip—not, however, before a glance had shown him that she was writing one of her familiar little pink-coloured notes, which, from another opened envelope and note by its side, appeared to be in answer to one just received.

“ I am interrupting you, Rose,” he re-

marked ; “ were you writing to me—par hazard ? ”

“ Oh, no—how could I possibly have anything worth saying to you ? I was merely writing to my milliner. Tiresome creature ! —my new dress for to-morrow is hideous, and there is scarcely time to make me a new one. Where will you sit ?—this horrid sun has nearly blinded me ! ” and, closing the curtains, she threw herself into a chair, with her back to the light. “ Tell me what you have been doing this last age ! ”

Philip thought her manner somewhat forced, but replied quickly—“ I am glad you consider three days an age, Rose ! —however, it is not my fault that I did not see you yesterday. I called, and you were engaged. Are you really growing so artificial ”—he went on—“ as to call this bright sun horrid ? After all the winter fog and the yellow glare of gas-light, I should have thought you would like the return of spring.”

“ Ah—that is where it is ! ” she replied,

with a pretty sigh. “I am so accustomed to the false glare, as you call it, of my gas-lit life, that I am losing my pleasure in all old things. The sunshine makes me miserable, and I hate the smell of violets, which they are selling in the streets; you know, until I was fourteen I lived in a country village, and I think I would rather never be reminded of my early life. But you have not seen me in the new ballet—and I am perfect in it. Do you know the whole thing was composed expressly for me—and they say the last flying scene is my *chef-d'œuvre*, and little C——i is mad with jealousy at my success !”

“I do not go much to the opera now,” replied Philip. “And, besides that, you know that I do not care to see you dance. I like to think of you as you are now, Rose—quiet and lovely, and with me—not gazed at, and commented on by half the men in London in your stage dress. In fact,” he continued warmly. “I hate ballets—I have hated them ever since I knew you—I cannot bear to think

of you continuing this public kind of life for years. Do you think you could be happy if you gave up the stage, Rose—could content yourself with the quiet, everyday happiness of any ordinary woman ? ” He seated himself by her side, looking very earnestly in her face, as though reading her reply more on her features than in her words.

Miss Elmslie’s colour went and came. There was something in Philip’s manner, which actually made her own heart beat a little, and, under the impulse of the moment, she would have gladly given up her beauty, success, admiration—all that constituted the sum of her existence—to be once more innocent, and able really to love, and be loved by, a man like Philip Earnscliffe. At least, she thought so !

“ Give up my profession ! ” she replied, averting her face. “ Oh ! it is too late. I have nothing to return to now—I have no friends, no relations—and without something to fill my heart and time, I should soon weary of quiet, and only long the more to return to the ex-

citement and forgetfulness of my present life—and it *is* delightful to be so much admired! But,” she continued softly, and this time she was really not acting when large tears filled her eyes, “if I had earlier met some one to care for me, to warn me of the dangers of my position and save me, I should have hated to be a dancer—now it is too late ! ”

“Rose,” began Phillip in a low grave voice, “it can never be too late—”

She shook her head; but he persisted. He too was carried away by impulse—the girl’s beautiful face, and touching contrite manner had never so affected him before—he began talking about a quiet cottage in the country, and a life apart from the whole world—and, heaven knows to what further extent Philip was about to commit himself! when at that moment a discreet knock came at the door of the room, and immediately afterwards, his guardian angel—in the shape of Miss Elmslie’s very diminutive page—entered.

“Please ma’am is the note ready?” said the

child—he ought to have been better trained, but Rose had only had him a few days in her service, the former boy having outgrown the fairy-like dimensions of her carriage—“The Count’s groom says he has got so many ladies to call on this morning, he thinks he can’t wait any longer.”

Her face turned crimson with mingled shame and anger at the boy’s stupidity, and Philip, with the feeling of one who has been rudely awakened out of a pleasant slumber over the brink of a precipice, rose to his feet.

“Tell him,” stammered Rose, “to wait—I mean there is no answer—no—I will send one—in the course of the day.”

The page withdrew, to comment on his mistress’s odd manner and the young gentleman’s face to the Count’s groom, and left Rose and Philip once more alone. But in those few moments an immense space of time seemed to have elapsed.

She was the first to speak.

“It is nothing,” she hesitated, “only an

answer to an invitation—Count B——you know—” Philip said nothing—“has a party to-night—only a musical party, I believe—and—and—wished me to join—Celeste will be there—and—but I shall not go,” she added, glancing at his face.

“And you were doubtless writing a refusal when I came in,” answered Philip. “Or did you say *that* was to your milliner?”

“It really was, I assure you.”

“Let me see it.”

“Do you not believe me?”

“Let me see it.”

“Oh, you are too hard upon me,” she answered, and burst into tears.

It was her best move. Philip never could stand the sight of tears, and his tone softened.

“Let me see your reply,” he said again.

“I have surely a right to require that.”

She rose very slowly, and after visible hesitation, drew a little key from her watch-chain and prepared to unlock the case.

“Do not ask me,” she said once more, as

she paused irresolutely—her head bent down, and her slight figure leaning in an attitude of excessive grace against the writing-table.

Philip's eyes were intently fixed upon her, and she was so lovely at that moment, that he could scarcely feel angry with her for anything; but he answered—

“ You have deceived me, Rose: however, as you object to it, I do not ask to see the note. You have a right to keep your own counsel. For the future I will not attempt to interfere—”

She flew to his side.

“ I have deceived you ! ” she cried, her cheeks burning brightly, and her eyes swimming. “ I have deceived you—and I confess it ! I told you I was writing to the milliner when you came in, because I knew you would think me wrong to go to a party at Count B——’s; but I really was to go with Celeste, and we both meant to come away early—I am so sorry now—so truly sorry—only let me write a refusal to that horrid man, and—forgive me ! ”

As Philip had told Neville he had too few youthful illusions left for him, to be willing to part with any of those which still lingered ; and with Rose's imploring eyes and flushed cheeks before him, it must not be greatly wondered at that he did forgive her.

He saw the note written and sent, and tried to believe that she had accepted the invitation at first, merely through her childish love of gaiety. They were reconciled ; and Rose made faint attempts to renew their former conversation ; but Earnscliffe could not at once get over the shock of this little incident. Count B——'s shadow had darkened the prospect of a country cottage, and he left Miss Elmslie's house in an hour's time without having returned to the subject which had, so happily for himself, been interrupted.

“ Come to-morrow, and you will see how fresh I look after my early hours to night ! ” were her last words as her hand trembled in his at parting.

CHAPTER XVI.

PHILIP felt in an unsettled mood after he left Rose. He had no particular engagement for the day ; and when he had looked in at his club, and wandered about the streets for a time, he grew weary, and directed his steps homeward. The whole of this time his mind was dwelling on the occurrence of the morning.

“ Is it possible, after all, that Neville was indeed right ? ” he thought. “ And is she—not merely light and *childish*—but false ? She deceived me so coolly about the invitation, when she first saw me, and then afterwards—still, I suppose if Celeste is to be at this party

Rose might think it a fit one for her too—poor child ! He must invite a different class of guests now, by the way, for Celeste never used to go to such houses as Count B——'s!" He paused. "I wonder if Celeste *is* going to-night, after all?"

This doubt once awakened, Philip could not rest till it was satisfied. He turned his steps at once in the opposite direction, and an hour afterwards was seated in Celeste's drawing-room—all perfume, and *ormolu*, and rose-coloured light—and listening to the lively little Frenchwoman's affectionate greeting, until he almost forgot the object of his visit.

She had not seen much of 'ce cher Philippe' lately, and was enchanted to be able to talk over his recent success.

"At length they begin to appreciate you," she exclaimed in French, as she made him take a seat beside her, on her dainty satin sofa. "These monsters ! You will be one of the first writers of the day—indeed you are so already—you are immortal, and I—in my

humble insignificance—I shall always retain the happiness of feeling that I was one of the very first to recognize your young genius, and to give you my small encouragement.” Poor Celeste! she quite thought that her little supper-parties had some way or another assisted Philip in the literary world.

“And I,” returned Earnscliffe, kindly, “shall always gratefully remember your zeal and warm sympathy with me in my failure. I have many to congratulate me now—but you were one of the few who stood by me through everything.”

Her eyes softened.

“Ah, Philippe! you have a long and brilliant career in store for you,” she cried; “and in your celebrity and your active life, you will have no time to think of old days. But I shall not forget you! As Fridoline says, you are the only man in the world with whom one can forget that one is an actress; and, you know, it is pleasant sometimes to think that we belong to the same

humanity as your own sisters and wives. Poor little Fridoline!" she continued; "do you not think she has been looking pale of late?"

Philip, with some feeling of compunction, was obliged to confess that he had not seen her for a long time; he had been so fully occupied.

"Yes," interrupted Celeste, "I know all about that. But your book has long been published, and your present occupation is not of a nature worthy enough to make you forget your old friends; and Fridoline and I both used to consider ourselves among the number."

Philip was silent. Something in Celeste's tone struck him as more than mere wounded vanity, or feminine jealousy, and it reminded him of the object of his visit. He shrank, however, from approaching the subject; and, after a short kind of laugh, went on inquiring for Fridoline.

"I shall never understand that girl," replied Celeste. "Her whole life is a perfect

mystery. She works on, as I never could, at her profession ; she improves wonderfully, and receives —mon dieu, quel salaire ! yet I believe every day she hates the stage more and more. Her greatest triumphs only give her a gloomy, unnatural pleasure, which arises neither from gratified vanity, nor any other feeling that I can understand ; and, with all her money, would you believe that, instead of buying toilettes, or ornaments, or a carriage, or giving parties, she still lives in that dull old cottage, with her one servant and her beasts, and will not spend a shilling on a cab in rainy weather. And yet she is no miser ; for she will give freely to any unfortunate being she meets in the streets ! She goes nowhere but to the theatre, and to see me ; in short, as I said, her life and herself are mysteries ! ”

“ You know more about her than anyone, Celeste. What do you really think is her early history ? for of course, little Fridoline did not actually drop from the clouds, when she first appeared in London.”

Celeste shook her head. "I know nothing—or next to nothing," she replied. "Fridoline is like a child in telling me all the incidents of her present life; but, if anything happens to lead her towards the past, she becomes suddenly silent and confused, and evidently shuns the subject. Two things I *do* know," she added, hesitatingly, "and certainly I would confide them to no one but yourself; however, I know you are so unlike most of the world, that, if I told you, her secret as far as it goes would be safe, and also that you would not judge of Fridoline by mere appearance."

"And these circumstances?"

"Well, they are these." Celeste drew a little closer, and lowered her voice. "The first perhaps you may think unimportant, Fridoline, though she always speaks of herself as an orphan, has a mother living, and not very far distant. This I know for certain; for when she was ill and delirious—"

"And you nursed her, Celeste."

"She more than once spoke of her mother,

wildly and mournfully, but in terms which shewed that she had only lately parted from her. The second clue is dark, and to me incomprehensible; and often and often I have thought over it, and vainly tried to connect the circumstance I am about to tell you, with Fridoline as she now is. You shall however judge for yourself. When Fridoline had been in London some months, she chanced one day to be sitting with me when an old friend of mine from Paris—a relation of my own in fact, who had just arrived in England—came in, unexpectedly, to call. The moment he saw Fridoline I was sure he recognized her, and his surprize was unequivocal; while she on the other hand, bowed when I introduced them with the perfect *sang froid* and unconcern of a stranger, and soon afterwards rose and took leave. The door had scarcely closed when my relation exclaimed—

“‘ Where, in Heaven’s name, did you pick up that girl ? ’ ”

“‘ I do not know what you mean by picking

up," I replied. "She is Mademoiselle Fridoline—the most rising young actress in London, and a particular friend of my own!"

"Oh!" returned my cousin. "So that is little Fridoline. Well—I am glad you like her, and perhaps you can tell me something about her past history!"

"I was obliged to confess that I could not; as there was considerable mystery attached to Fridoline—and it was not even known to what country she belonged.

"Then," he answered, "I can give you some slight information on the subject, at all events of her life in Paris."

"I never knew she had been there," said I.

"My cousin smiled. "My apartment at home," he continued, "happens to face the house of a certain Russian prince"—he told me his name, but it was so hard and hideous that I have forgotten it—"and sometimes, when I am tired, after my day's work, I amuse myself a little by watching the visitors

of my princely *vis-à-vis*. As to the men—I have seen, of course, English lords, French peers, German princes, by dozens, enter the hôtel—but the women—bah! all of one class, and the worst.'

"‘Go on,’ I said, impatiently. ‘What has all this to do with Fridoline?’

"‘Well—only this. That on three different occasions last winter—and she may have been there scores of times before—I saw that girl descend from a fiacre, towards dusk, and enter the Hôtel Danon.’

"‘Impossible!’ I cried.”

"‘But I would swear to it!’ he answered. ‘Her’s is not a face to forget. Twice, certainly, I only saw her from my window, and I grant that I might have been mistaken; on the third occasion, however, I happened to be passing the porte-cochère of the hotel exactly as she was entering, and the light falling full upon her face, I saw her as plainly as I do you now—and she and your friend are the same.’

“ His manner was so odiously positive that I was convinced of his truth, in spite of myself; but I tried to account for the occurrence by observing that, allowing it was true he had seen her, Fridoline might have some humble friend among the prince’s dependants whom she went to visit.

“ ‘Wrong, madame,’ he replied—I hated him for his coolness—‘this young person did not stop at the Hôtel Danon to visit any humble dependant, as I will show you. After my rencontre with her, I returned to my apartment ; and, as it was a fine winter evening, I seated myself for awhile at the window and began watching the passers-by, and the opposite house ; but certainly not thinking of the young girl who had just entered it. I had a particularly good view of the interior of one magnificent salon, the curtains and blinds of which were still unclosed, and, as the twilight was deepening and the room lighted by a blazing wood-fire, I could discern all the objects within with perfect distinctness. My eyes had

not long been fixed upon this window when a figure, crossing before the fire-place, arrested my attention ; it crossed and re-crossed, evidently pacing up and down the room ; and I at once recognised our little friend of the fiacre. She had removed her bonnet and shawl, so that I could remark the extraordinary quantity of fair hair which fell round her neck and shoulders ; and this, together with her small figure, gave a childishness of appearance that, seeing her in such a place, made me pity her.

“ ‘ She was apparently waiting for some one, and in a state of the greatest agitation—her hands clasped together upon her bosom—her head bent down as she walked. It struck me at once she was some young girl who had been seduced by the prince, but of whom he had afterwards tired, and that she had now come to make a last appeal to his honour or generosity. And this conviction was subsequently strengthened by the fact, that I never again observed her enter the hôtel. Well, after about ten

minutes' waiting, I saw her suddenly stop in her hurried walk, and another figure entered and crossed the room towards her.

“‘For a moment the girl seemed to hesitate and shrink back; then she raised her head, and, stretching out her arms, fell upon the neck of her companion, in a long and apparently passionate embrace. After this, the two figures moved away to a darker part of the room, and I saw no more of them; for, in a few minutes, an attendant entered and closed the curtains. I cannot be actually positive that the other person was the prince, it was about his height, and, in my opinion, it was he; but I could swear, in a court of justice, that the young girl I saw that night in the Hôtel Danon, and your friend, are the same.’”

“I hated my cousin,” proceeded Celeste, “for his story, and told him so. However, this did not prevent me from being convinced of the truth of what he said. He is a matter-of-fact person, this cousin of mine—a Paris advocate—and not likely to be deceived by

imagination. But how deeply it grieved me I cannot tell you! For a time Fridoline's austere life seemed to me only hypocrisy—with her cottage, and her flowers, and her pets, after the life she must have led in Paris—and I could have hated her for her pretended innocence. However—perhaps I was to blame,—the recollection of my cousin's story gradually wore off, and at last I have ceased to think of it; or rather, I am now convinced that, if Fridoline would, she might explain away this occurrence, mysterious though it appears."

"And did you never give any hint to show that you were acquainted with something of her history, and thus lead her to speak of it herself?"

"Oh, no," answered Celeste, with true delicacy, which might have done credit to a duchess. "As *she* wished to conceal her past life, I could not let her know that I had become possessed of any clue to it. I have never even asked her if she has seen Paris."

Philip felt strangely depressed by what he

had heard. Though far from believing to the full the evil that had been reported of Fridoline, he was now forced to doubt her; and it seemed to him that he was just beginning to discover the falseness of every human being he had ever liked or admired. This thought naturally led him back to Rose, and the immediate object of his visit; and after a pause, he remarked, with an air of assumed indifference—"Well, Celeste, I must confess I have left off attempting to understand any of your sex. One after another all my early prejudices are vanishing."

The actress opened her great black eyes.

"(So—he has found Rose out!) I hope you do not mean that I am changed?" she added, aloud.

"No—" replied Philip, "but you have certainly altered a little in some things. For instance, a year ago I don't think you would have gone to one of Count B——'s supper parties—"

"Count B——'s supper parties! I enter

Count B——'s house !” cried Celeste, in a burst of outraged innocence. “ And who tell you dat I go near dat monstre ? I enter into his house !” In her indignation she tried to talk English.

“ Don't be angry, Celeste !” said Philip—but his own cheek was very red—“ I was told that you were to be at his house to-night, and I believed it. Forgive me.”

“ Mon dieu !” said Celeste, resuming her own language, “ what could induce people to invent such wicked scandal ! I—who am so exacting in my tastes—who unite under my roof all that is worthy and distinguished—I to go to one of Count B——’s disgraceful parties, with chorus singers and such people ! No, Mr. Earnscliffe ! that is not the society I frequent ; and I did not think so old a friend as yourself would have believed such infamies.”

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"I beg your pardon," he said, rising to take leave. "I little thought of offending you when I made the remark. I am out of spirits, and scarcely know what I am talking about this morning."

Celeste's anger was short-lived; and as she held his hand at parting, she looked very full in his face, and said—

"Pauvre ami! I believe I understand your feelings far better than you do yourself."

The rest of the day lagged wearily to Philip. Proof of Rose's treachery seemed to confirm all that Neville had ever said of her, and once or twice he thought—

"It would have been better to let her accept Count B——'s invitation and break with her at once. Rose is not the first that has been false to me, and I could go abroad and forget her."

But then again her young face, in its sorrow for her fault arose before him! He could not believe her to be worse than childish, and almost longed to rush to her house and ask her

to forgive him for his suspicions. Philip's own nature was so frank, that he shrank with actual pain from the idea of being deceived ; and he turned away from any thought of another's unworthiness, until it had strengthened into certainty. Confiding—sensitive—and withal somewhat indolent—he was exactly a man to be deceived, not once, but dozens of times in his life, and Rose—with her beauty, and her guileless manner—was just the kind of woman most likely to deceive him !

He dined at his club ; and spent the evening there with two or three old acquaintances. One of them had just returned from Italy ; and having seen Neville in Rome, had much to tell Philip about his friend, whose genius and cool eccentricity, were creating quite a sensation among the English in the Eternal City.

“ From some caprice,” he said, “ people want Neville to be the fashion, and a lion ; but it won’t do. He says he has gone to Italy to work—and refuses nearly all invitations. Some

fair Roman I was told, even fell in love with his bronzed face—he looks like a Spaniard after all his wanderings—and contrived to let him know the tender nature of her feelings; but his answer was characteristic.

“‘Signora, I have no time !’

“Yet there is nothing churlish or selfish about Neville—on the contrary, he is one of the best fellows in the world. One object, one desire, has taken hold of him, and he can never lose sight of it, or be drawn away by pleasure either of the soul or senses. He will be a great artist!”

Philip asked if he had done any large picture lately ?

“No, he was only studying—spending the entire days in the different galleries, and in fine weather, sketching in the Campagna or among the ruins round Rome. He seems thoroughly happy—your friend Neville—and told me he hoped you would join him by next winter.”

“Perhaps, I may,” returned Philip ; “I

am very undecided at present, whether to go abroad for a year or two, or not."

The conversation now turned into other channels; and, about twelve o'clock, Philip started to walk home.

It was warm and starlight, and he enjoyed the beauty of the night in the quiet, undisturbed streets. He sauntered along slowly; but when he had nearly reached his own lodgings, a sudden fancy made him wish to extend his walk, and, scarcely heeding which way he took, he went on towards the Regent's Park. He felt calmed by the influence of the stillness around, and his mind recovering its usual frame, he thought less about Rose Elmslie than he had done all day.

Gradually he fell into one of his old reveries—and walked on and on—entirely lost in himself, and thinking of his starlit walks at Harrow, and the boyish poetic dreams which *then* filled his heart—until he was suddenly aroused by loud bursts of laughter, and a stream of light across his path. He looked

up—and, to his surprise, became conscious that he was exactly opposite Count B——'s villa.

The occurrence was purely accidental. Philip was incapable of attempting to watch the movements of Rose, even had he still doubted her ; and when he discovered where he was, his first impulse was, either to pass the house quickly, or retrace his steps home-wards. Some after-thought, however—perhaps one of those unaccountable presages of evil, which everyone must so often have experienced in his own life—made him pause.

“I shall go home happier,” he thought, “when I have seen the kind of party from which I saved poor little Rose !”

But he had a nervous feeling all the same. The party was now at its height ; and, to admit cool air to the heated revellers within, the curtains were withdrawn, and the windows on the ground-floor thrown wide open ; so that where Philip stood he had a full view, through the shrubs in front of the house, of

the interior of the supper-room. It was brilliantly lit up with groups of wax-lights, wreathed round with artificial flowers, and the night air was laden with the scents of costly viands and wines, and perfumes. But this voluptuous refinement was confined only to the externals of the feast—the peals of laughter, and the tawdry theatrical dress of the female part of the guests, left no doubt about the class to which they belonged. The men seemed mostly friends and associates of Count B——'s—gamblers—*gentlemen* swindlers—and doubtful foreign noblemen.

The uproarious merriment waxed louder and stronger, when suddenly, amidst those bold laughs and coarse jests, a sweet young voice smote on Philip's ear, and made him turn pale. He took hold of the iron rail by which he was standing, and listened! Again and again he heard it—clear and joyous—the voice of Rose; and, with a desperate resolution, Philip resolved to stop, and know all.

Changing his position slightly, he saw her

at the head of the table, on Count B——'s right hand—flushed and animated, and lovelier than ever. She was dressed in a little ballet-looking pink dress—her exquisite arms bare almost to the shoulder, and glittering with gems and bracelets—and a bouquet of white roses (the same which Philip had that day given her) in her bosom. There was not the slightest shade upon her features ; she looked, as she felt, radiantly happy, in her beauty and her jewels, and the admiration she awakened, and forgetful of that morning, and everything else besides.

Count B——, evidently under the influence of his own champagne—was talking to her in low whispers—his arm over the back of her chair, and his eyes fixed upon her face.

The rest of the guests were too fully occupied with themselves to observe them much ; but Philip noted his earnest manner, and her low answers and averted eyes—noted them, as Lady Clara had once done before, when he, not Count B——, was the recipient of her smiles

and blushes, and, whatever Clara had then felt, she was certainly avenged at this moment !

Philip's of course was not the anguish of a boy robbed of his first pure love, or of a man suddenly awakening to a knowledge of his own dishonour. Rose had never been anything but a dancer ; and there was, perhaps, in this last discovery of her true character, nothing to be wounded but Philip's vanity. Still, amidst his disappointments, his own fancy had raised her to the place which should have been held by a worthier object. He had believed her erring—never lost ; and now, as he saw her in an atmosphere whose very breath was corruption, surrounded by women from the lowest grades of her own profession, and receiving with smiles the whispered flatteries of a world-hardened sensualist like Count B——, a sense of mingled disgust and regret came over him, which, without being agony, was very bitter.

Suddenly there was a pause ; and the Count, striking on the table, announced to

his guests that Miss Elmslie was going to sing. Rose had a very sweet voice, and had often sung to Philip when he was weary and miserable.

“Bravo!” cried a pale young Frenchman opposite her. “A song from *la belle Rose*! Attention!” And everyone listened.

“What shall I sing?” said Rose.

Several songs were proposed, but she turned to Count B——, as though appealing to his preference.

At first he scarcely understood her, then mentioned, as it chanced, a favourite ballad of Philip’s, and the one she had oftenest sung to him. He saw her face change a little.

“Not that,” she said: “any but that.”

“And why not?” returned the Count; “if I wish it, why not that?”

“I have forgotten it,” pleaded Rose.

“But I will have it!” he went on, with the pertinacity of a half-sober man; and then he whispered to her—something which made her smile.

“ Well,” cried Rose, “ if I must—but give me some champagne first, my lips are too dry to sing.”

He poured her out half a tumbler-full, and she drank it off, and began. Her voice faltered at first, then steadied; and, except that it was louder and less modulated than usual, she went through the song well.

Philip heard her till she had finished—listened to the loud applause that followed—watched her smiling thanks, and Count B——’s low praises and increasing warmth of manner; and then he turned away homeward. He had seen enough.

He walked about a hundred yards away from the house, until the last faint sounds of the distant revel had died away, then he stopped. His arms were folded, and the dim light of the stars fell full upon his grave face.

“ And among such people,” he exclaimed, “ I have spent my existence!—and to that very woman I was, this morning, ready to give my love—and even, in some measure,

bind my future life. Good God! what a fool I have been! and how have I wasted all my hopes and energies! Well, the last illusion is over now; this little dancer has brought the finishing stroke to my belief in any human being, and I am free. Yes," he went on, passionately, "as free as a man without an affection or tie of life can be. It is all the same—fortune, friends, wife, mistress—all and faithless!"

The next day he left England.

END OF VOL. I.



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